

ONE: The Butterfly (Day 0-1)

Tuesday, September 3, 2013

Lukan's fingers hovered and shook over his laptop keyboard. Does he send this message or not? That was the question. If there was anything Lukan knew about himself, was the fact that he was just some gay raccoon who had the wrong talents given to him. That and he was a damn awful decision maker.

The day was September 3, 2013. 6:38 PM. It's been about two hours since he had gotten home from an unusually rough patch at school. It seemed his junior year in high school was not going to be nearly as kind as the past two years were. No matter, Lukan felt ready for anything at that point. In fact, Lukan felt that his long battle with depression was finally beginning to taper off and in his favor. Lukan was now posting that fact on an art sharing site where he could indulge in his one true talent in the world, which was writing. Although the raccoon had wanted to be good at drawing for his whole life. But alas it seemed to have never meant to be... For some reason, Lukan felt the need to let everyone on the site know that his emotional state was rapidly improving. Not to gloat or anything like that, no. Lukan is far from that type of coon. His intention was to offer help to those who were still locked in the emotional cage known as depression. Knowing first hand how awful it feels... He felt almost obligated to help. But his finger... It hovered over the mousepad that would send his message and refused to go down... why? Why is this going to be a big deal according to his instincts. Lukan knew that he hesitated over literally everything, but... But this? What real harm can it bring? He had a feeling he was going to find out. No more hesitation. He forced his finger to hit the send button, and he made himself wander from the page to avoid deleting it. Well. There was no turning back now... No matter the turmoil that was to instigate...

Wednesday, September 4, 2013

Lukan sighed heavily as he closed the door to his apartment behind him. It was time for another day at school. He already missed the summer vacation that had only just ended a week prior. Not having to worry about getting up so damn early and doing as you please with your daily routines were the best parts about them. But no. School HAD to interrupt once again. Not that the raccoon had minded as much since his last school year had actually gone rather spectacularly. His GPA was at a 3.8 and he made lots of friends at school. It was such a good year that Lukan had genuinely began to think that his life was finally improving.

When Lukan was eleven years old, five years ago, he had traumatic experiences in a town down further south after becoming homeless with his mother when the housing market decided to commit suicide or something. It wasn't something Lukan could have understood so well back then, but he always blamed himself for it, since he made the decision to move there. The said decision may not have mattered in the end, but he still felt responsible. In the years that followed the event Lukan struggled a lot with his social life. It was something that knocked all faith and trust in other creatures straight out of him.

On the morning of September 4, he made his way to his next day of school. He took the bus there, but the bus did not stop at his apartments. Only the grade school busses did. No, the one that went to his high school stopped at the middle school just a couple hundred yards behind it.

It was a rather warm morning, which was unusual for his area. The place was well known for dropping into wintry weather as soon as September took its first steps, but lately, it's been hotter than Lukan could comprehend. It even hit 95 degrees yesterday afternoon which was simply blasphemous! Lukan privately hoped for another warm winter like the one from his freshman year while people screamed global warming like bloody murder.

The bus was a little late, Lukan noted as it pulled up to let middle schoolers off and let him on. He was the only teen to get on the bus right there so the driver recognized him instantly every time. He took his usual seat closer to the front, and waited for the bus to take off. It was at this point Lukan always plugged in music in his ears to listen to the whole way. It was something that drowned out the constant incompetence of the other students on the bus. He did not want to know what kind of fucked up shit they were conjuring up this time and just prayed they left him alone, which they usually did, much to his gratitude.

It was a 35 minute bus ride to the school because his school was the last stop his bus had. First it had to stop at another middle school, which was down the street from the other high school in town, where it also had to stop. There were 60,000 residents in this city and it had only two high schools. Well, three if the one for more special needs students was counted, which it generally wasn't. Even during his freshman year, Lukan noticed how crowded both his and the other high schools were. They were actually going to begin renovating the other school, which was the Lilac Grove High School. Named after the town it resided in. How original. But HIS school, Fox Mountain High School was going to be completely rebuilt. Sadly, it won't be finished until after Lukan graduates, so he'll never see the completed facility, nor the demolition of the old building, but hey, seems like he'll graduate on the 50th anniversary of said school so that is something.

Upon arriving at school, Lukan walked to the cafeteria where all the students hung out before classes began. He got out his music again and listened for the bell. The bus had gotten here later than usual. Sure enough, there were only five minutes before the bell would ring. The bus did not get to the school until such a short amount of time before the tardy bells rang... It was much more inconvenient in the winter when the weather was as shitty as possible and/or if there is some sort of traffic problem. Lukan always hated the bus system his city had...

The bell rang. Time to go to art class. The school was so overcrowded at this point though that only freshman and sophomore students had lockers. Juniors and seniors got fuck all. Luckily, his sophomore friend, Fall, a quiet and skinny wolf, gave him his instead saying he wasn't going to need it.

His art class went off without any hitches. Just more banter about gestures and how starting off with as little details as possible would help in the long run. Lukan wasn't sure how to feel about the effectiveness of that claim, but he's seen a lot of successful artists do similar tactics so whatever.

Today was Wednesday, the day of the week where members of his class, aka fellow juniors, would meet in a sort of homeroom to discuss their progress in school so far. Since it was so early in the year, they would not have much to discuss. It was basically a thirty minute break every student gets every Wednesday as a sort of "congratulations, you're halfway through the week" break.

Lukan flipped open his computer to the art sharing site he frequents a lot. It was where he shared his stories to the world, even though they were kind of shit. Yesterday, he had posted a message on a depression thread of the site where he wanted to help those that are like who he used to be: in a constant struggle with depression. He thought that if his was ending, he would in turn help others.

That's when he saw that he had a response from someone. He wasn't sure if he should click on it. Lukan almost did not even make that post in the first place! But he did it for a reason. Lukan decided to read what it said.

"Hi, Lukan! I suffer from a lot of the same problems that you do now. Including attempted suicide. Um... I'm still recovering from a lot of this, even after six months. I-I'll cut to the chase. I'd like to be friends. I actually live really close to you as a matter of fact. Lilac Grove right? I live in Castoria, just 25 miles east.

I-I mean... only if you want to. I'd like someone to talk to. I'll listen to everything you have to say too if you'd like!"

The message was aliased to a username that read "KlaustheRudderbutt". Rudderbutt... That most likely meant that Lukan was just contacted by an otter. It was sent to him literally a moment ago. 9:36 AM? It was 37 now... And from Castoria too...

Lukan lived there for a couple of years following the incident down south. He wondered if he had seen him around there; Castoria was a really small place.

Lukan replied, not knowing exactly what to say. He just said that he was glad he got the message and would be happy to help him if ever possible. He also mentioned that despite his improvements, he was still feeling bouts of depression here and there. Mostly due to how badly his summer ended and how badly his school year began so far. He sent the message, but he did not get a reply for the rest of his break time. He assumed the otter got offline as soon as he sent the reply not expecting the raccoon to be online right away. Lukan shrugged it off and hoped he would see the mysterious creature later.

Lukan's next class was English. And Lukan knew that it was not going to be easy. When it comes to English, Lukan was only really good at writing. His reading and speaking and listening scores were always subpar at best. Only his writing ever kept him afloat. The raccoon was never sure exactly how he got so far in school with his terrible scores there in mind. Grammar practices. Planning out the first book report. Not much new to speak of. Just stuff for Lukan to dread later in the quarter. Goody.

Lunch was next. This was the perfect opportunity to check his computer for a potential response from Klaus, if that was his real name and not the name of some OC. Lord knows that on an art site, usernames are usually of the users' OCs and such. It was regrettable that his best friend, Fall, had a schedule that put him on the other lunch break so they couldn't hang out. Fall was doing a lot to fix that, as far as Lukan knew. He wondered if it was going to be possible to find any classes that would let him do that considering how full the school is. Nonetheless, Lukan was already feeling lonely without his friend. Lukan mostly ignored the food he got. So he opened his laptop and saw that the Klaus character had replied. Lukan's eyes sunk as he saw a long reply. He hated reading long replies. He skimmed it.

"I feel the same way. ...I've been in and out of recovery. ...I dunno what to do with my life anymore. I had a boyfriend recently break up with me. ...I want a hobby or two or a friend to help my situation. Hey if there is anything you need to talk about, feel free to confide in me. I'm not good at giving advice, but if you need a face to yell at, here I am!"

Lukan started reading more of it towards the end, but that was the gist of what he needed to see. Lukan replied with some goals that he had for his own life and very briefly about his own experiences. He also apologized for the late reply because he was in school. The otter replied rather quickly.

"Yeah that's fine. Don't worry about it. Maybe we can meet up somewhere in Lilac Grove if you'd like."

Lukan was not entirely sure how to feel about this situation. Meeting a total stranger in person? Sounds like a whole lotta stranger danger like from when he was five and there was propaganda telling you to stay away from creatures you did not know. Still, Lukan felt compelled to accept the otter's offer. He even told him what school he went to. Lukan could not help but think he did something relatively badly. But once again. Only time will be able to tell for sure at this point.

After lunch was math. Now math was a weird one for Lukan now, as he used to be better at it than nearly anyone else in his grade. But now he was in what could be summed up as trigonometry. And oh god. From what Lukan has seen so far from this branch of mathematics, he knew he was going to have a really bad time... Homework was handed out on nearly the very first day... and he had no idea what he was doing. What happened? Algebra was so easy, but this? This is madness! It hurt his brain just thinking about any of this nonsense! How did he expect to get out of this alive!?

And finally to round out his day, was history. The only immediate problem with his history class was that it was just in the EXACT position it needed to be in the building to be stupidly hot inside. It did not help that it was yet another blazingly hot late summer day that day. Lukan sat sweaty and uncomfortable as the instructor went on about how history shaped where they were today and that they all had some sort of personal history that led to where they were today as well. Lukan did not really care about it as much since his own personal history with his family was mostly unknown to him. His mother knew very little as well.

The instructor was a well built tiger that looked as though he'd fit better as the Phys. Ed teacher. He said something that definitely got Lukan's attention. "So that's why, in order to get to know my students better, I want all of you to construct a slideshow about your family's history, could be your mother's, father's side or both. You will also need to bring in an heirloom that represents that history. I will not take no for an answer." That worried Lukan immensely alright, given what just went through his head about how little he knew about his past. Damn... this had better not bite him in the tail later.

The day was over. He checked his laptop for one last reply from the otter. The otter said that he knew the school. Something about having to drop out to help family... and then he said that he'd meet Lukan by the outdoor swimming pool. W-wait! The outdoor swimming pool was closed off because they were going to demolish it as part of reconstructing the entire school soon! Lukan frantically began to type out his reply, but he knew that the otter was likely already on his way there.

Dammit! If he did not meet the otter in time, he would definitely miss the bus and he'd have no ride home! ...Why did he agree to meet the otter after school if he had to take the bus home!? ...Why was Lukan such a stupid raccoon!? All these questions blazed in Lukan's head as he stumbled around the hallways wondering where the otter would go instead. Perhaps the indoor pool? No... then he would need to get a visitors pass from administration, then he would have to explain why he was there and Lukan would get directly involved very quickly.

Lukan frustratedly opened his laptop to check for an update. There was none. Growing more worried by the second, he scrambled around school for the mysterious creature. He could only go off of the fact that he was an otter. And there were dozens of them at his school! He had checked the creature's profile and the otter seemed to be a distinct shade of orange that contrasted most if not all the otter's around. Green eyes.... Wore long shorts. Or were they pants that were much too small? Lukan could not remember! Did it even matter!? Lukan hated the fact that he overthought everything. Sure it's saved his fur sometimes, but most of the time it's nothing more than a hindrance.

Eventually he found his way outside closest to where he could get to the blocked off outdoor pool. He had to go all the way to the phys ed department and leave from the doors opposite of the health room. It was quite a ways out of the way for anyone to go to out here considering all the stairs and hallways one would have to follow to reach the otherwise barely visited area of the school. Once outside Lukan saw an otter exact to the description in his mind pacing back and forth looking flustered. The orange furred creature was surprisingly tall for his species and his clothes looked slightly tight on him. He looked a couple of years older than Lukan, but he couldn't tell if that was because he was, or it was just an illusion brought upon by his height.

"What the fuck? Since when was this pool closed before fall? What the fuck are they doing here?" he was muttering. Despite irritation permeating his voice, it was clear to Lukan that he was normally not outraged in the slightest. His voice was calm, charismatic, and yet... there was a tinge of... what was it? Sadness? Regret? Something Lukan knew all about was all he knew...

"It's because they're rebuilding the entire school soon. The outdoor pool is being demolished," Lukan explained. Instantly the otter jumped.

"Da fuck?" he breathed. "Oh... I didn't see you there... And really? Please tell me the pool will be back when the school's done. I loved swimming here as a cub..." he said.

Lukan shook his head. "I have no idea."

The otter pouted. "Damn! Guess we'll have to see in a couple years. Anyways. What are you doing here? I didn't think many others came all the way out here."

Klaus did not seem to realize that this was the raccoon that he was meant to be meeting today. Lukan extended a paw. "Lukan V. Benka. I believe you know me from online," he said slowly.

The otter took it. "Oh, it's you!" Klaus breathed and shook it. "It's awesome to have met you! I'm Klaus Richtors. I uh... used to go to this school, but I dropped out for... reasons... uh..." he trailed off. Lukan had to wonder why. The otter did not seem too much older than her was. Probably 18 or 19.

"Reasons...?" Lukan pressed.

Klaus shook his head. "I uh... I don't like talking about them. I... I suppose I'll tell you later," he stuttered evasively. "Right now I wanted to try and get to know you.. You know. As a person?" There was something strangely awkward with this creature... Lukan did not know what though. He was not entirely sure he trusted him yet.

Lukan nodded, tight lipped. "Alright. What did you want to know?"

"Well... I would like to know how you beat depression? M-maybe I could do something like it to kill mine..." the otter said, looking down at their paws.

Lukan was somewhat taken aback by the question. While Lukan feels his depression is dying, he wasn't sure how he even did it. Ever since the start of the last year, 2012, things were looking up for him much more than the four years before and stayed that way for 20 months. How would he even answer this question... ?

"H-honestly, I don't even know." He started speaking what his mind just said to him. "Since 2012, things were going really well in my life for some reason and it just stayed that way..." Lukan replied.

Klaus looked down. "So is it up to luck or something?" When Lukan shrugged he went on. "Wh-what do you think you did that started the change?"

Lukan shrugged again. "I dunno... started playing a lot of Minecraft?" he half laughed. When the otter wasn't smiling he went on. "Well my depression was caused by having my trust destroyed by others and the fear and paranoia that resulted from wondering who would hurt me next. I-in 2012, I found a lot of friends I could trust, I guess... Fall, Tyler, Kira.... The list goes on for a bit. Although Tyler moved back in June..."

"O-oh..." Klaus replied unsteadily. "Yeah I get how it feels to have no one to trust. I... I'll admit it was because of that that kept me from replying to you for the longest time!"

Lukan laughed again. "Really? Because I was so on edge the whole time I typed that message that I almost did not send it. Like, this close." he held two fingers close together to illustrate his point.

"Wow, then I guess it was fate that brought us here then... maybe you can help me then," Klaus stated. There was something... very off about his tone just there. Lukan could not tell what. Fuck his Aspergers from keeping him from deciphering

mannerisms easily... He swore it was because of that that he could never tell when someone was manipulating him... Suddenly, a fresh wave of paranoia slammed him and weighed him down. Klaus noticed. "Hey. Are you okay? You spaced out or something just there."

Lukan nodded. "Yeah, I'm still alive," he said. "I guess. Sorry I... get lost in thought a lot... Helps me tune out the world we live in. Which is good and bad I suppose..." Lukan was now speaking erratically. God damn it. Stop!

Klaus only nodded in understanding. "That's fine. I totally get what you mean."

Lukan only nodded. "Y-yeah, uh... so what did you want me to help you out with?" he asks subconsciously.

Klaus tilted his head. "Well uh... I already told you," he said in confusion. "My depression..." he trails off.

"Sorry," Lukan stated. "I'm not too bright when it comes to... talking to people," he explained. "Never have been, never will be."

"Haha, me too," Klaus replied. "I know exactly what you mean."

There was silence between the two. It wasn't an awkward silence, but that was probably only because both of them weren't good at conversation rather than just one of them. They just sat there, staring into the future destruction/construction site in front of them. Then, Klaus broke it.

"I suppose... what I need to break down my depression is to have a friend to hang out with. Though it will be a pain driving here from Castoria all the time... Not exactly wealthy enough to have that much gas in that truck."

Lukan shook his head. "It's fine. I-I mean sure we can be friends, but um... I get if you can't visit too much."

Klaus sighed. "Still I... I will try to. I get incredibly lonely, you know?"

"Maybe. I'm used to being alone. I force myself to be alone," Lukan stated flatly. "I never trust a soul. Because I can't."

"Oh?" Klaus's small ears perked. "Care to tell your otter friend why?"

Lukan sighed and looked down at his paws and tail. "I uh.. I don't want to. N-not right now. I-I'm sorry." He felt tears beginning to well up in his eyes. No. Stop it you fucking wimp!

"I understand. I dunno if I can tell you my stories either, you know..?" Klaus replied softly. He suddenly gave the raccoon a hug.

"Soooo what now?" Lukan asked, looking at the orange mustelid beside him. A light breeze kicked up and ruffled their fur.

The otter shrugged. "Maybe we could ask each other questions about each other?"

"Makes sense for new friends to do that I guess," Lukan said. "Not that I'd know," he added humorously. This caused the otter to chuckle. Throughout the next

several moments, they discussed each others' favorites of many types of things from colors, to food, to movies, to video games... Lukan was surprised to find that the otter enjoyed Pokemon about as much as he did. Klaus was just as excited as he was to see Pokemon X and Y see its release next month, among other things.

Also Klaus had revealed that he was indeed older than Lukan by a couple years. For some reason that made Lukan slightly more uncomfortable.. He knew it was likely due to distrust. Then the otter let something slip.

"...I remember when Pokemon was starting to become popular again when fourth gen was released. Yeah... that was a bit before my friend and I ended up--" but he stopped himself right then and there and refused to say another word right away.

"K-Klaus?" Lukan tried to get his attention. "What did you say?"

"Nothing." Klaus snapped instantly. "I said nothing."

Lukan did not believe it for a moment. A brief pause. "It has something to do with your story, doesn't it?" he prompted.

Klaus sighed, "I... yeah. It does. But ya know, it all began as I started school in 2000... um..." he trailed off.

"For me it... was all normal until WHAM! The housing market crashed and EVERYTHING went wrong. You know... 2008." Lukan replied. That made Klaus jump.

"2-2008? That's the same year--" he stopped himself again. "I guess that year was shit for everyone, wasn't it?"

"I suppose so," Lukan shrugged. "I'm surprised I am still alive after that... I still have dreams about those trains..." this time, he stopped himself. Klaus looked at him.

"Trains huh? Interesting. Tell me more." He was obviously joking, as Lukan watched his thick tail sweeping the ground mischievously.

"Nah, not yet," Lukan played it off. He looked at his watch. "Wow it's already getting late. My mom will be expecting me home soon."

"When? I can drop you off," Klaus offered.

"That would be nice," Lukan nodded. "3:45." he added to answer.

"Alright, let's go now."

There was only one way out of the area they were. They had to turn around and loop behind the building where the track and field was. This path would take them to the north parking lot, which was the only parking lot currently available for use, since the others were blocked off. Lukan had noticed the traffic problem at this school had gotten so much worse than ever, ever since. This was one of those few times he was glad he did not drive. Klaus though, wasn't happy.

"You would not believe the hell I went through to get a place to park around here. Why the hell are they blocking everything off around here!?"

"I told you. They're building a new school," Lukan answered calmly.

"But why though!?"

Lukan shrugged. "I head it was because of the overabundance of asbestos or something like that. The school closed for an entire year back in '89 because of it."

"Oh yeah I heard about that. So no more of that nasty stuff soon?"

"Yeah. But I won't be around to witness it. I'll graduate before it's finished."

Klaus had led him to a dark blue truck. Lukan could not make out the model or anything like it... "Well that sucks," he said as he opened the passenger door to let Lukan inside. Lukan clambered into it with difficulty. God damn his short legs... "So where do you live?"

Lukan jumped a little in the seat. He wasn't sure if it was a good idea giving this creature his own home address. "Y-you know where the new Talon Middle School building is? I live close to there."

"Oh yeah, I remember when they were building that. Man, are they gonna rebuild every school in the district or what?" Klaus asked as he started the truck.

Lukan shrugged. "Dunno. I just hope they build another high school... three-ish high schools ain't enough for a 60,000 creature town. Did you know that Juniors and Seniors aren't getting lockers? There's only enough for the lower classmen. It's bullshit! And this is the only year I've actually needed a locker too so far!" Lukan ranted as Klaus drove. "At least Fall is a sophomore..." he sighed.

"Is Fall a good friend?" Klaus asked.

Lukan nodded. "I don't see him too often because our schedules suck, but yeah. He's a nice guy."

"That's good. Always good to have actually nice friends..." Klaus said, as if he were barely paying any attention.

"What do you mean?" Lukan prompted.

Klaus shook his head. "It's all a part of the problem I have with life," he stated simply. "Maybe I'll tell you tomorrow."

"Okay. Not much time today," Lukan said,

"No," Klaus affirmed immediately. "I have some stuff I need to do with my parents anyways. No compromises or exceptions..."

Lukan was surprised that the otter still lived with his parents. Although... if he were only 18 like he indicated, it made sense. As if anyone could be on their own right now given the way the economy works...

The rest of the drive went by quietly. It took Lukan usually about 15 minutes to get home by car. The one that his mother drove anyways. As if Lukan could get his license himself. How was that to be if his mom did not know where to begin teaching him? It was a complicated mess for sure...

Klaus pulled up in the parking lot to his apartment complex. "So I will see you tomorrow?" he prompted.

Lukan nodded as he jumped from the vehicle. "Of course. Meet up by the north parking lot this time. I had a helluva time trying to find you today."

Klaus giggled. "Okay, silly coon. I'll be seeing you." He closed the truck door, and drove off, leaving Lukan to wave goodbye to him. The otter seemed like a really nice guy at first. But for some reason, there was something about him that made the raccoon feel uneasy. Lukan assumed it was his lack of trust in general or social skills. He could only wait and see what was to come the next couple of days. Lukan shook his head. He was probably being ridiculous. What could one simple message turn into?