

Two. Decision's Echo

It has been a few days since Lukan had first met the enigmatic and quite the intriguing otter in the park. And in those days that passed, Lukan was completely unable to chase him out of his mind. No matter what he tried to focus on, there he was. His slender body, brilliant deciduous tree colored eyes, orange tan fur... Why was this? And why was he always just there? If Lukan had responsibilities like school, they would have inevitably ran his performance into the ground, he just knew it. Well, Lukan did have a part time job as a janitor in some supermarket nearby, but having a pensive mind there was not enough of a hindrance to be any sort of concern. A coon as pensive as he was knew that something like this would happen, though. Felt like it happened every time something in his life changed, for better or worse, to him.

The day was now Halloween as a matter of fact. Ah October 31.. Feels like once the cubs have had their fill of door to door candy donations, the weather would shift to Autumn Phase 2, where the weather would become much, much colder than before and would resemble winter more than fall. Seemed that by November, all the fall colors were gone, and the trees became depressingly dead and foreboding in appearance. Lukan had always preferred October over November for that reason. But seems the latter half of autumn was just about to make its presence.

It was evening, just as the sun was about to go down, just about seventy-two hours since Lukan had first met Klaus. The two new friends exchanged each other's online identities so they could converse even when miles apart. However on this day, Klaus was nowhere to be found online. This left Lukan wondering what he was to do now. Suddenly everything he used to do on his free time left his memory entirely, and he was not sure what he used to do all the time. Read? Write? Draw? Go to the park...?

Well, either way, his mother wanted him to help out with the trick or treaters again this year. He did not know why, because as apartment dwellers, they next to never see anyone trick or treating at all. It felt pointless, and a thorough waste of time, and candy for that matter! Neither of them were too terribly big on candy, and it was just the two of them in the apartment, so a lot of it usually went unconsumed when the holiday was over. Lukan remembered one time they still had Halloween candy even by the time he finished school one year. Yup. All the way to June. What the actual hell? It simply made so little sense to him.

So another year has come to repeat the entire process. Dress up as something mildly spooky, this year, as a were-coon, and wait. Wait for nothing essentially. Okay so absolutely zero cubs was an exaggeration. Maybe if they were lucky, one would come by once every hour or so. Not many creatures ever bother with apartments, and many of them know it. Lukan was always curious behind the reasoning for that, having

lived in them for essentially his entire life thus far. Save for... a couple time... however. It was just something he dealt with though, especially after he himself stopped trick or treating when he was 12. Lukan could not understand how that was seven years ago now... and that his adolescence was coming to a close in less than two months now.

"How many creatures do you think will come by this year, Lukey?" Oh yeah... and there was his mother's smallest obsession with calling him "Lukey" for some reason. The mother coon was a short one in her mid-forties, and weight just above the two hundred pound mark, and constantly going up and down for various reasons. On top of being a diabetic, it did not help her cause with health at all.

Lukan sighed, not wanting to be here, and feeling more angsty because of it today. "Four. I dunno. It's just never very many you know?"

His mother shrugged. "Well that means more candy for us then if that's true?" she prompted. Ah, but she does this every year. And every year it's no different.

"It takes us months to eat all that candy. Neither of us like candy as much as everyone else," Lukan felt like he should have been recording these words since the first time he had to repeat them, so he wouldn't have to again, and just played the tapes, just to prove to his mother how samey every year was in this regard.

"At least we won't have to buy any more candy ever again in those months, am I right?" she countered. And Lukan had to admit its validity. Candy did last that long, generally speaking, after all. Still, it all just felt redundant to Lukan.

He and his mother seldom spoke that evening. Lukan noted how he had not actually told her about meeting Klaus yet. He just did not really feel the need to. And besides, she always went off like a siren whenever he made friends and began raving about it. She wants him to have more friends, but he insisted he was just fine by himself. And he always had been. Why change now?

Lukan counted the hours that ticked by as well as how many times the door was knocked on. Three hours. Two knocks, meaning two families. Ah. Even this year, they were running below average. Lukan sat there at the dining table, tapping his fingers, growing hot, sweaty, and itchy in the costume. This only further strengthened his impatience. He knew better than question his mother about the whole situation because of how many times he's tried in the past, only to be met with her effectively evasive answers.

Suddenly, a knock on his door sent his fur bristling. He was not expecting that to happen in the slightest. Damn... when there was knocks, he knew that it validated his mother's points despite how spotty they were. Lukan stood up, and opened the door, roughly with his usual were coon growl. A little girl squeaked slightly.

Then Lukan's eyes flashed recognition. A family was looking back at him, an otter family. The orange tan fur and emerald eyes crossed his vision. But they were in a robot costume. It was-- "K-Klaus!?" he exclaimed in surprise.

The otter's face lit up and beamed happily. "Oh my God! My friend is a were-coon! Somebody help!" he exclaimed, pretending to be afraid.

Lukan studied the otter. "Hm... This is interesting. Artificial intelligence is becoming more and more adept at copying emotions. I had no idea my otter friend had been a robot this whole time!" he replied brightly, following along.

Klaus then started moving his arms and torso stiffly like a stereotypical robot would, and then in a monotone, replied, "Yes it is true, my demonic procyonid friend. I am the Otterbot 9000. Here for your sugary tidbits."

The little otter girl that was now obviously his sister punched Klaus on the leg. She was in a purple butterfly costume. "No you're not! I am!" she rebuked.

Klaus smirked. "Of course you are, Kandice..." He said that in one of the most insincere voices Lukan ever heard. He guessed his ulterior motives.

"Gonna take her candy when the night is done, Otterbot?" Lukan asked suspiciously.

"If she misbehaves, our parents agreed to give all the candy to me!" Klaus proclaimed confidently.

Immediately upon those words, the older otter man piped up. "W-we did no such thing, Klaus!" he scolded.

"Oh..." Klaus looked defeated as his sister laughed. "Well it is definitely a surprise to see ya here!" he recovered in a flash. It was almost whiplash to Lukan. "So I take that we actually live pretty close to each other then?"

"I-I guess so!" Lukan stammered surprised that this may have been a fact. "Wh-where do ya live then?" he asked curiously.

"Oh just in the neighborhood on the other side of the apartments!" Klaus replied brightly. "We thought we'd give these apartments a go, just 'cause we can! I had no idea that you lived here, man! It's so cool!"

Lukan laughed at the otter's excitement. But because he was also happy that his friend was so close by too. "It's amazing how big yet small Lilac Grove is though..." he said. "So uh... How's your luck going in these apartments?" he asked, looking right at his mother.

"Um... weirdly. We've not been getting many folks who have candy, but the ones that do give us a lot," Klaus explained. "So I guess it kind of evens out right?"

Lukan glanced back at his mom, who just shrugged. Well... That was an interesting compromise to both their arguments... "I guess so... But are you all just planning to hit this complex tonight, or are ya gonna..." Lukan trailed off, not certain how to finish his question. Yeah. Real brilliant social skills, there, procyon...

Klaus shook his head. "Probably not. But I am most certainly glad we did!" he said brightly.

"I-I am too!" Lukan added genuinely.

The otter suddenly jumped slightly. "O-oh! I almost forgot why we were actually here! Kandice?" he looked down at the young otter girl at his side.

She almost immediately replied. "Trick or treat!"

This immediately prompted Lukan's mother to grab the still nearly full candy bowl, and drop a fistful of candy into the girl's bag, which Lukan noted was a little over half full with the new additions made to it.

"Thank you!" she exclaimed brightly as she turned to her parents to presumably show them what she had gotten, leaving Klaus the only one focusing on the raccoons now.

Lukan's mother entered the picture before Lukan could even have the chance to say anything to the otter. "I don't believe we've met yet?" she prompted, looking at the mustelid closely. Klaus looked somewhat uncomfortable.

"N-no I don't think we have," Klaus replied, keeping his cool. He then introduced himself to Lukan's mother, holding out a paw.

"Nice to meet you Klaus.. My name is Sarah. Sarah Benka." It felt weird to Lukan for her mom to use her actual name. He's never really heard it used much before. Only when handling her medications and crap that would require it.

"Lukan did not mention he made a new friend the other day..." she noted. Lukan could not resist rolling his eyes. She always did something like this when she met another one of his friends. She did it with his best friend, Fall, from high school years ago. "He never talks to me about anything, so I guess I shouldn't be surprised.." Lukan stifled a cringe. Okay... That was a little embarrassing.

"No? Well some creatures have their secrets after all," Klaus replied light heartedly. There was... an unmistakable, yet indistinct twinge in Klaus' voice when he said that. Lukan looked into his eyes, trying to understand the enigmatic message, but found nothing but simple greenery.

"Seems only natural," was Sarah's response.

"Y-yeah..." was the only thing Lukan could say to the awkward situation. Then he shut his trap, realizing he potentially made it even more so. Stupid coon.

"Aw come on! Lighten up! It's Halloween!" Klaus patted Lukan on the shoulders. Then Klaus resumed the Otterbot voice he was using to play with Lukan before. "Will were-coon assist Otterbot in taking over the world?" Klaus winked.

"U-uh.." It took Lukan two seconds to compose himself into his character. "Were-coon would love nothing more!" he said in a growling voice.

"You two are such dorks," Sarah snickered, flustering Lukan.

"M-mooooooooom!" he exclaimed, breaking character instantly and face turning red under his make-up as Klaus laughed.

"It looks like I have already started cracking that coon shell of yours, huh Lukan?" he said, still giggly.

Lukan still had no idea what that otter was talking about in regard to this coon shell that he has now brought up for the second time. Although Lukan figured it best that he shouldn't question it.

Klaus noticed his silence and scowled. "Or not. Thought I had something there..." Now there was even more curiosity. D-did the otter make it his mission to do whatever breaking him out of his coon shell meant?!

Sarah shrugged. "He's been reclusive ever since that incident when he was 11. I dunno what exactly goes on in his mind, but--"

Lukan interjected. "Um hey. I am right here still!" he exclaimed, quite indignant that they were talking about him when he was right there between them.

Klaus paid no mind and looked at the procyon. "Hm... Sounds like a part of whatever story you have, huh?" he asked teasingly.

Lukan flushed. "Y-you stop that!" he fumbled for the right words. As always they remained as elusive as ever.

Just then, Klaus' parents inserted themselves back into the conversation. Lukan had momentarily forgotten they were there too... "Well, we really think we should get going now. More places to hit. Only got one evening to do it in." It was Klaus' father who spoke. "Or you can stay behind with the raccoons if you'd like, since we're so close?" he offered as the otter's face fell.

"K-Kuaren!" the mother otter chastised the father. "It's a family night! I will not split us up on a night like this!"

The father otter named Kuaren shrugged. "The choice should be up to Klaus. After all, he is all grown up now..." And it seemed the mother backed down from there, admitting that he was right. Lukan was surprised. Since when does the female authority ever back down from the male authority...? He has never seen that before.

"Yaaaay no big brother to try and steal my candy this year!" Kandice squealed happily.

Klaus put his finger to his chin. "Hm... hang out with coon friend... or take sister's candy.. They're both such perfect options..."

"D-don't you dare!" Kandice yanked her stash out of her brother's reach.

Klaus shrugged. "It's a shame to break tradition, but... I'mma think I'll go with the coons today," he decided, looking right into Lukan's eyes. Lukan caught a long, and meaningful look at the deep evergreen pools of soul in the otter's face, becoming mystified by their gaze. Lukan felt he could stare into them forever...

Kuaren nodded. "Then we will see you later tonight." And with that, seeming without even waiting for Klaus to respond, they backed away from the coon residence, the young otter girl giving her thanks, and then, they were gone.

Lukan went up to close the door, forcing himself to snap out of his gaze. Then turning back to the otter, shyly attempting to avoid his eyes again, he said, "So uh... what should we do then?"

Sarah inserted herself again. "Well I suppose I should let you two boys be for now. I'll handle the trick or treaters.." Which Lukan knew that she was going to anyways. They took a few steps further into the apartment, to the coons' sparse living room.

The otter looked down at his paws and then answered Lukan's question. "I guess I will admit, I have no idea, but... I was thinking a bit ago. I think I am ready to share with you the story I have regarding what I have been through before?" he said that shyly, as if he still weren't sure how much he meant that. Wait...

"Klaus, I uh... I don't recall ever hearing you say you actually had a story of some kind uh... I thought that was me?" Lukan tilted his head in confusion.

Klaus' eyes widened and he flushed. "O-oh... Oops. I forgot. That's right... Well I guess cat's out of the bag now right?" he seemed even more awkward and nervous now. This was the kind of demeanor that Lukan would have. Why was this seemingly social creature exhibiting Lukan's usual mannerisms?

"Klaus? Are you okay?" Lukan felt concerned and worried. The otter's emotions seemed to switch so quickly.

Klaus shook his head. To clear it. "Sorry. Still kind of feeling a bit of residual heartbreak from before," he said unsteadily. "But um... yeah..."

For some odd reason, Lukan knew exactly what to say next. What the hell? That does not ever happen! "Klaus, if you don't actually want to say anything, don't say anything to me, okay?"

Klaus took a deep breath. "I am so sorry. I probably should tell you. I can't afford to keep this a secret any longer."

Lukan tilted his head. "Okay. Let's go into my room then.." he said, leading the creature down the short hallway. There were two doors on the left, one on the right, and a closet on the end. "The first on the left is my room," he explained to the mustelid, opening the door, to reveal to the otter, his late teenager room. A mess of clothes, music, and video games everywhere. Far from a clean room, his was...

Klaus recognized some of the stuff lying around. "Did you go through an angsty teen phase too?" He seemed to have abandoned his emotions from earlier.

Lukan tried not to flush indignantly. "N-no! I-I just really liked the music a lot of them listened to!"

"Linkin Park... Simple Plan... Three Days Grace... I think you did," Klaus teased.

Lukan failed to suppress his flush any longer. Then he realized that under his Halloween make-up, it would be too hard to notice. "S-stop that you evil otter! I just really like that kind of music!"

Klaus giggled. "Relax coonie, I'm just teasing you. To be fair though, I think you'd look hot in goth or emo attire," he added with a wink.

Lukan was almost completely certain that his red face was now visible, even through the Halloween dyes on his face. "Wh-what is that supposed to mean?" he said shakily.

Klaus shrugged and kept his voice smooth and even. "Well the clothes and style would match your fur perfectly." He paused for a moment. "What? Am I flattering the coon over here?"

Lukan way too quickly attempted to deny the claim to the point where he was almost completely unintelligible. "N-no! I-I mean-- no!" he exclaimed, indiscriminate sounds being mixed in to add to his fluster. He turned away to avoid the otter's face. He didn't want him to see how badly he was probably blushing. Klaus took notice as he seemed to think he may have gone too far.

"Oh Lukan, you know I am just joking around right? I don't mean to seem like I'm hitting on you or anything," Klaus said softly. "I guess it's because now that I'm single I just.. Tend to do that you know? Even to guys I know are straight!"

Lukan still did not want to face the otter yet and was still too flustered to come up with the right words to say. But he did want to tell the otter that it was okay. But no. No words came to his throat. It was completely empty and devoid of any letters, let alone words. Quite the contrary to the day they first met, and yet it leads to the same result in the end: silence. And this time, it was an awkward silence. The type of silence Lukan hated. Lukan wanted the silence to be broken. So he decided to grace it with the first things to come to his mind. "Well I think they would look good on you too!" He immediately covered his muzzle with his paws. "F-forget I said that! Ugh I am such a stupid fucking coon..." he berated himself. Where the hell did that even come from!? That wasn't the first thing in his mind; he wanted to show forgiveness to the otter!

"Well I guess that's payback for flattering you too much then," the otter took it in stride. "But thanks!"

"I uh... no problem...?" The raccoon was out of things to say again almost immediately. So much for rejoicing in finally having a clue before... Wait. "Hey Klaus, are you still sure about talking to me about what your past was like? Are we even good enough friends for that?"

Klaus' happy face was turned one hundred eighty degrees. "No. I really honestly don't want to tell you. Or anyone for that matter. But I know that I should."

Lukan was barely sure he understood what the otter meant by that. But he shook his head. "No. Don't tell me anything until you are absolutely sure of it. To be honest, I know I am not ready to talk about my life, whatever life I have, to you just yet." Wait. Why did he just indicate that he didn't have much of a life? ...Oh. Because it

was true. Lukan was more or less okay with it, though. He just hated how boring it made him seem.

Klaus seemed to have picked up on the implications that Lukan had just made, as he tilted his head, curiously scowling. But he did not say anything on that. "O-okay... Then I will tell you just one thing I want to tell you at least," Klaus paused.

Lukan filled in the gap left behind by that pause. "Only if you want to, Klaus."

Klaus nodded. "Okay... Remember when I said I met Platt online? On the Internet?" he started, somewhat hesitantly.

"Y-yeah," Lukan summoned the memory to his mind.

"Well... You don't know that I met him when I lived in another state. We were long distance until I finally convinced my family to move here."

Lukan was thoroughly taken aback. "Wait, what!? But you seemed like you've lived here forever!" his eyes widened. How could this be?

"Well... we have been here a while. Five years in fact. And Platt and I had been together that long. U-until... well... You know..." Klaus was talking much, much more slowly than Lukan had ever seen him do so. Granted he only knew the creature for a short time, but...

"Oh my God," Lukan breathed. "I-I am so sorry."

"N-now you see why I want to leave Lilac Grove. I never belonged here in the first place. And now, I never will," his voice hardened with anger. Then it softened a bit. This otter was better at shuffling his emotions than a randomizer. "It isn't your fault, Lukan. It's okay." The otter then proceed to embrace Lukan in a warm and tight hug.

Lukan was struck with a feeling that he had never felt before. It was one that was thoroughly foreign to him. He did not understand what it even was. And yet, he could not deny that he liked it. He could feel the otter's feeling being transferred to his own mind, and as enigmatic as they were, he could recognize pain and disappointment. But that was all. The otter's body was warm. Inviting. Soft... Was this what a more interpersonal relationship could be like? What else was he missing out on? Lukan patted the otter's back, as he often seen pairs do to comfort each other when one is feeling down.

When Klaus broke the hug, there were tears in his eyes. "Well.. I guess I will start working my way out of this town then. My reason to be here is gone." It seemed like it hurt the otter a lot for him to say that. Lukan understood why. But he felt the same way.

"Well, it would suck to see a new friend go so quickly," Lukan said sadly. "I want out of this town to be honest. I just dunno when, how, or where to go yet."

Klaus sighed. "I don't know where to go yet either. I am thinking of going back to my hometown of Rosethorn in the next state, but... There ain't much more there than here in all honesty. Was a small town boy, living in a lonely world. ...Man it no longer rhymes," Klaus sighed.

Lukan was out of things to say again. Such a feeling came naturally to him...
"Well uh... Hm..." he struggled.

"I cannot believe I did that to my life for a guy that I just lost," Klaus scowled.
"Well, I was only 14 when I did that, so... I was a stupid ass teen."

Lukan tried to lighten him up as he did a bit ago. "Well, to be fair, we were all stupid ass teens at one point right? I still am one!" Even though his 20th was less than two months away in December.

"Silly coon. I am sure you are a lot smarter now than back then. After all, you did kick your angsty teen phase's ass by now right?" Klaus teased.

Lukan flushed immensely. "I-I can't kick what I never had!" he exclaimed indignantly.

"Heh," Klaus looked at the wall. "You know, I don't think I would mind this place if I had a friend like you to use as an anchor to keep me here..."

"Oh Klaus, you don't want this loser of a raccoon being your only reason to be here," Lukan said modestly, still blushing. Lukan yelped somewhat as the otter took him into another hug.

"And if I do?" he asked. Lukan had no smart remark to say even though he had thought of one as Klaus continued, "I am the loser, not you, you silly creature!"

Lukan, for the first time, accepted and returned a hug that was given to him.
"Okay then. Let's be losers together then." And Klaus had no arguments towards that idea at all. Lukan wondered just how much of a help he could even be for this otter. Or better yet, what it all could possibly mean for him and his life?