

Four. Imperfect Certainty

Lukan could not get the otter out of his mind. Not even just because of the idea of his presence in the raccoon's life now, but also because the procyon feared that he made the otter upset at him. Now this... This was one of the other reasons Lukan never really wanted to make very many friends, for he knew. He just knew that one day he was going to fuck it up real bad and the creature would never want to speak to him ever again. At least when he was younger, the reason he never made many friends was because he always moved. Now though...

"Attention, can we have Lukas Benka up front please. Lukas Benka, up front." Reality has once more pushed Lukan's mind back to reality as he heard himself being paged to the front of the store. And no matter what, he was never going to get used to being called Lukas. Oh great. What could it be this time he wondered?! As a janitor for this wondrous supermarket here, it could only be a handful of things!

"It seems they want you up there, Lukan," said one of Lukan's coworkers. It was one of Lukan's only friends besides the otter. In fact his only other friends were his coworkers here. This one was a vixen by the name of Eira Tharo and she worked in the produce department. She had remarkably green eyes like the otter's but not quite as vibrantly emerald as his. Hers were more of a grassy green. She had an attitude that indicated she cared very little about what was going on and that she preferred to be left alone or with like minded people. She was really friends with Lukan mainly because they had gone to high school together in the years past. "Um... Earth to Lukan? Any soul inside that coon shell there?"

Lukan jolted himself at the mention of the phrase "coon shell". Many images of the otter began flashing through his head, almost immediately forgetting Eira was there once again. It was not until the fox started shaking his shoulder to bring him out of the clouds and back down to Earth that Lukan paid her mind. "O-oh, sorry Eira.." he said clumsily. "I'm going up there now."

Eira stopped him before he could take a step. "You seem... more distant than usual. Is everything okay?" she asked, concerned.

"U-uh, yeah, everything is fine," Lukan replied awkwardly. "Life is just... being strange is all."

Eira did not seem to buy that. "Life is always strange, ringtail. Tell me what is going on. After you deal with whatever the supervisors want with you first of course." Oh yeah, and there was the fact that Eira was rather pushy, asserting what she wants regardless of what the other party feels. This has undoubtedly led to many altercations between her and other employees at this job.

Lukan grumbled aloud. "Alright fine, whatever," Lukan only conceded so he could get her to stop pestering him about it. The raccoon knew that if he wanted to stop drawing all that attention to himself, he needed to either hide his clouded mind better, or find a way to disperse those clouds. And Lukan had no idea how in the hell to do either.

"Um... So are you going to go or what?" Eira prompted confusedly. Lukan shook himself awake and wordlessly strode from the backroom. Oh this was going to be even harder than he thought.

"What?" Lukan demanded the supervisor to repeat what she had just said to him. He could not believe what exactly he had just heard them say for him to do, but--

"Push carts. We're too short on pushers today and we need you to fill that void." The supervisor was a particularly irritable old gray fox. And like his other vixen coworker, there was just simply no point in arguing with her. At all. One would just inevitably lose. End of story.

Lukan let out a subtle growl. He hated doing that job. It required more strength and stamina that Lukan had the ability to hold in his body at one time. Ugh. At least it was for only half the day. Though he was most certainly not looking forward to fighting the wind all afternoon to perform this job. Lukan did not say a word as he went to the service desk to pick up a traffic vest. He knew that would not be the best idea in the world.

It only took Lukan several minutes to find himself mostly out of breath. God dammit. Of the two mechanical cart pushers, one of them was being used by the only other pusher that day, and the other was broken after a former employee crashed it into a creature's car. Whew. Lukan almost wished he saw the shitstorm that resulted from that day. Lawsuits and obvious terminations were had. Although Lukan knew he'd follow suit if he used one of those contraptions himself. Especially since most creatures don't pay any attention to what they're doing over ninety percent of the time...! And the wind would only make things even more treacherous too. Wonderful.

Lukan stalked over to another one of the filled cart corrals in the parking lot, breathing heavily as the wind blew his tail around like a wind vane. To think Lukan was already rather grumpy from his rude awakening that morning... Now he was to contest taking it out on Klaus, and now this? This was just not his day.

A thud happened. Oh shit. Lukan had hit a car with his train of carts. Oh that's not good. Lukan was relieved that it was only a tap; his weak upper body strength kept him from going too fast, but he hoped no one saw that. He knew he could easily get fired from such carelessness. Lukan growled as he pulled the carts back onto the path he was intending to make, and forced his aching muscles to move them out of the lot,

and back into the store where they belonged. THEN he decided to mentally berate himself as per usual.

Lukan knew he was prone to spacing out. The raccoon hated how he never took measures to prevent that...! Then again, with someone so mentally invasive as that otter was... was there any prevention possible at all? Nah. That's not possible. Not with that otter's smile, his eyes, his charisma. And who could forget just how sleek his body was...? Lukan couldn't nor would he want to--

"Have you finished getting the carts from the lot, Lukas? Your shift is nearly over," came the voice of his supervisor. The only thing that happened more often than Lukan's spacing out was the voices of those that snapped him out of it. Somehow.

"U-uh..." Lukan was not even paying attention to his progress at all. He just started on one side of the lot and worked towards the other. Where was he again...? "I was just uh... about to go get the last one!" He said sheepishly.

The fox gave him a disbelieving look, and then one of concern. One he had been faced with a lot these past couple of hours. Oh not this again...!?

"You alright?" Lukan barely managed to keep a groan from escaping his muzzle. "I know you are usually not that responsive, but you seem like something else is on your mind entirely today."

"I uh..." Lukan knew there was no evading this one. Eira, maybe. But his supervisor? Forget it. "It's just stuff going on at home," he said. The only key there could be to get out of this was to be as evasive as possible. A tactic that at least... worked sometimes. Maybe.

At that moment, another, more familiar vixen had entered the store through the same way Lukan had just done. "Waaait, now I know where I have seen that look!" Oh no... Eira is back. She often went to break outside at this point. Why couldn't she just mind her own business!? "You're thinking about someone aren'tcha? A pretty lady coon perhaps?" she jested teasingly.

The hardest fight that Lukan had to fight thus far was the fight to prevent himself from blushing right in front of these two nosy vulpines. He... was not even sure if he won that fight. "Yes I am thinking of someone," he started indignantly. Then he turned to Eira and finished, "and no it is not what YOU think! I made a friend of mine mad earlier and I feel really bad about it..." while not the whole truth, it was no lie.

"Hey, it wouldn't be that otter I saw you with earlier, would it?" Lukan jumped at the mention of that "O" word.

Lukan was getting increasingly more frustrated by these two foxes and their privacy invading noses. And it was getting harder to hide said frustration. Lukan just wanted this conversation to end. "Yes. And I hope to make it up to him after work," was all he plainly said before walking away further into the store. It was about time to clock out too, since the pair of them held him for so long. Well, at least it kept him from

having to go back to work. Now the real challenge is... getting the hell out of the store undetected. Lukan wanted nothing more than the permanent discontinuation of that awkward and uncomfortable conversation he was just having. He shuddered at the thought of confronting it again. No fucking way. He decided to evade the problem than confront it, which he knew was not the way life intended him to go. Wait...

No. There was no capacity or Lukan to allow himself to think about that right at that moment; he had to focus on escaping the store. Lukan swiftly clocked out and kept his eyes peeled. He darted out of the backroom and nearly stabbed his muzzle directly into the chest of a nearby creature due to his lapse of eyesight.

"L-Lukan!?" exclaimed a familiar voice.

Lukan's legs became entangled by themselves as the procyon tried to stop them from moving. "K-Klaus! Y-you're here!" he exclaimed. But Lukan could not allow his mind to be swayed again now. "Hey uh, listen. I would like to get out of this store as soon as possible. One of my coworkers keeps trying to bother me, and I do not want to stick around while she's here." But the otter seemed far from eager to move quickly from that spot.

"I just wanted to apologize. I feel like..." Klaus stopped mid-sentence.

"Feel...?" Lukan scowled and tilted his head. But before the otter could reply she appeared once again.

"Aha! There you are!" Lukan groaned. Eira found him already. "Hey it's that otter again! You're a friend of Lukan's right? What's your name?" She pestered, eying the mustelid closely. Klaus looked noticeably uncomfortable within milliseconds.

"Eira." Lukan said flatly. "Now is not the time."

"I'm sick of it never being the time, ringtail. I just want to know about your admittedly good looking friend is here is all," Eira completely disregarded the raccoon's tone and the otter's grimace.

"Is it your business to force yourself into our conversation though?" Lukan prompted coolly, becoming thoroughly annoyed by his colleague's nosiness. Klaus stiffened up beside him.

Eira shrugged. "Can't a fox be curious?"

Lukan's stare hardened. "Sure they can. But this is nosiness. Not curiosity."

"Fine, have it your way then, ringtail. I'll leave you two lovebirds alone then," she added with a giggle before taking strides into the backroom.

Lukan looked at that door, silently growling. Well. At least that went better than he was expecting it to. And he wasn't even going to dignify the term "lovebirds" with any sort of response.

Klaus sighed heavily, looking down at his paws. "I... I can see that I am just causing a lot of problems for you, Lukan. Maybe I should just leave you alone. After all,

you said that's what you like best right?" Klaus cut straight to the point, not even holding an ounce of desire to even mention the vixen's invasive escapades.

Lukan felt his tail droop to the ground in sadness at those words. "Oh Klaus... I honestly blame myself for seeming like it's a problem.. I-I did say that I am so bad with creatures and talking to them right? Well... um..." And case in point, he trailed off.

"Is that why you've locked yourself in a coon shell?" Klaus inquired.

Lukan shrugged, "Maybe."

"Or is it because of what you've been through?"

Lukan was not expecting that question although he knew he probably should have seen it coming. The otter did know that the raccoon had been through some cubhood trauma when he was eleven years old, but nothing more. Lukan struggled to find an adequate way to respond. "M-maybe that too..."

Klaus looked away, towards the sales floor of the store. "Do you want to break out of your coon shell Lukan? And I mean that seriously. I mean, when I broke out of my otter shell, it was... scary. But also liberating. But also risky. Do you know what I mean, Lukan?"

What kind of esoteric language was he speaking in? "I don't know," he said plainly. "I dunno if I will ever know what I want or need to be honest."

Klaus dipped his head further. "Are you okay with not knowing?" he asked simply. No seriously. What kind of arcane nonsense was this? Lukan's brain was already hurting from a long half day's work and now the otter was deciding to be philosophical? Not a good time! And yet, Lukan remembered the amount of negativity he has already shown to the otter. Lukan wanted to show no more of that much more than wanting the otter to be coherent again. But... the more Lukan thought about it, the more he realized the otter had some sort of point. He just couldn't comprehend what it was. The otter went on. "Well, if you aren't, then I need you to be willing to break your coon shell wide open and show us who you really are." He turned away and looked back. "It's up to you. I've made up my own mind when it comes to this."

Lukan was not sure what compelled the words in his reply. "And that would be?"

Klaus sighed. "Let's just say... I made a huge mistake with what I did before. But I won't say any more than that. It's all good now, after all!" he turned around and smiled. It was brightening. Beautiful, the otter's smile. Lukan did not know how much he missed seeing it until now. But... Something felt horribly wrong with it. Something that did not make Lukan feel happy.

"Klaus, I do want to apologize for earlier. Alright. You're right. Everyone's right. I'm not in my right mind anymore," Lukan finally confessed.

Klaus put his hand on his shoulder to shut the raccoon up. "You're just like me sometimes, I swear," he said with the same smile. "It's like we were meant to be friends or something, heh." Lukan still did not know what the otter was talking about. It

seemed like he was talking more to himself than to another creature. Like he was in his own little world, barely aware of Lukan at all. Almost like he meant all the words he was saying were really more for himself than Lukan. "Hey Lukan! Let's get you home!" Klaus exclaimed suddenly, almost like nothing had even happened. The whiplash had sent Lukan's mind spiraling further, but before the procyon could even utter a sound, the otter whisked him by the arm, through the store and past several curious onlookers. Oh how Lukan hated having attention drawn to himself. But he was too concerned about the otter to care about their stunned stares.

Once outside the store, Lukan managed to yank himself free and he immediately confronted the otter, feeling just as concerned for him as others seemed to have been for himself. "Klaus stop! What's going on? You're acting strange..."

Klaus winked and smiled brightly. "Now you know how I and everyone else feels," he chuckled. "Which is why you should tell me what's happening if you're feeling down! Hah! Payback!" At that second, the otter burst out laughing, prancing around as Lukan began to feel like the stupidest creature in the world. The emotion that followed next was relief that the otter was not upset at him after all. Lukan had to admire his cleverness...

"Damn it though Klaus! You had me scared for a moment!" Lukan exclaimed, lightly punching the otter's shoulder. "I was thinking about you through my entire shift and trying to think of the best way to apologize..."

Klaus continued his little dance. "Confess how you feel...!" he sung.

"And if I dunno how I feel?" Lukan prompted because this is how he felt a lot of the time. Which he realized was rather paradoxical of him to even think about.

The otter wrapped his arms around him and hugged tight. "Confess that instead!"

Lukan's fur bristled in surprise as the otter embraced him. He also felt a wave of flushing beginning to dye his fur red. "You...! You silly creature!" he exclaimed, trying to figure out exactly what he needs to say to the zany creature before him.

"That's what I like to be! I do hope I can break your shell so you can be too," Klaus replied happily. It felt weird for the otter to be so cheerful right now after what had just happened in the store, even if his negative and esoteric emotions there were just a facade. Still, Lukan's relief had overridden that concern.

"Ah, but I think you are far from doing that, my friend!" Lukan replied.

Klaus shook his head. "Nope. I can tell I am already not far off!"

"Oh really now?" Lukan sniped back teasingly. "We'll see about that!" Of course Lukan realized his responses and the way he was voicing them were backfiring and only proving the otter right. For some reason though, Lukan just could not be bothered with that. Was it because the otter actually was right?

Klaus had opted to stay over at Lukan's apartment again that night despite the raccoon's sudden urges to go over to the otter's house that night and see his place this time. The otter insisted against it claiming the lack of space in his shabby accommodations and that his family, more specifically, his sister, would annoy them much, much more than Eira ever did. This made Lukan question what on Earth could even make such a concept even possible, but Klaus just said, "Because it is" to shut him up. Lukan insisted on going even more strongly just to see what kind of miracle could pull it off, but Klaus won the argument by simply driving them back to the raccoon's apartment instead. Lukan found himself cursing the fact he could not drive yet...!

"How was work Lukey?" said Sarah as she always did when Lukan returned home from work. Lukan missed when the question was about school...

"Coworkers being annoying. Wind being annoying. What I had to do was annoying. So... annoying." Lukan replied with a sigh. "Also Klaus is back, if that's alright?"

"Of course it is! Why wouldn't it be?" Sarah asked.

"Um... because you hate company?" Lukan looked at her.

"Not unless I know they are nice creatures, like the otters are," she defended herself. Rather unconvincingly as well.

"Uh-huh. Sure," Lukan narrowed his eyes skeptically. After that Lukan had stopped talking to her because he knew if he did for much longer, they would draw out the conversation for over an hour, which he most certainly did not want to subject the otter to for even a microsecond. He took the otter back to his room, and Lukan mentally noted that the otter's makeshift bed was there. There was a distinct and comforting scent of otter in the blankets. Lukan felt his mind becoming intoxicated by them once again. Oh no...

"So... You gonna tell me what's up with ya or am I gonna have to act really fucked up again?" Klaus teased, sticking his tongue out.

Lukan jumped and blushed a bit. "Oh! Well um... I uh..." And his wondrous social skills have peeked out once more. What to even say!? "Ah jeez... where to begin?"

Klaus lightly rubbed the raccoon's shoulder. "I mean. You really don't have to; we just worry about you and want to make sure you're okay, you know? We all care about you."

Lukan sighed. "Yeah. I-I get that. I just never know where to begin, what to say, or if what I say will actually be accurate. I sometimes don't even know what the fuck my mind is doing."

Klaus continued to rub his shoulder tenderly. Lukan felt... Well Lukan found himself unsure of what he was feeling again. It was so new to him to even be confiding in anyone in this way. Sure he had counseling in the past, but it was so different with

his close friend. "I am right when I say it's because of me, right?" the otter prompted softly.

"Yes," Lukan said carefully. "It is."

Klaus nodded. "Okay, then tell me if you like what you've been thinking, whatever it may be, or not. Because I can't bear the idea that I am imposing on you, you know? Honestly... I think that's what went wrong with me and Platt. I kept asking a lot from him, and... well... he got sick of it."

Lukan's ear perked up. "R-really? Well uh... no. You're not imposing on me at all; I like that you're here. I do. It's all just really new to me is all. My mind can't adjust to what's going on now, so it just... becomes much more of a shitstorm than it already was!"

Klaus nodded again and breathed a sigh of relief. "Okay... I am so glad it isn't anything bad--"

"There's more." Lukan interrupted him one million percent unintentionally. Klaus looked at him curiously.

"Oh?"

Lukan took a deep breath, the otter's scent permeating in his mind as he did so. "I uh... I don't know how to word this but... then again I dunno how to word anything..." Good job coon. Beating around the bush and delaying oneself is always successful in getting a message across. Totally. "I feel that I do need a friend like you in my life. M-maybe this is what was missing in my life all along. Someone to show me that... not all other creatures are bad. There is just a feeling I have never really felt for anyone else before either. Not even with my other friends I had back in high school or anywhere. I don't know how to describe it."

Klaus tilted his head. "Is it from constantly thinking about me and liking my company or...?"

"Well yeah. Pretty much," Lukan shuffled his paws.

"I-I see," Klaus stammered, looking away. His tail was twitching on the bed slightly. It was then Lukan noticed a pair of small holes on each side of the tip. What...?

"What?"

Klaus took a long, deep breath. "I think I know what that feeling is," he started slowly.

"You do?" Well, Lukan knew the otter was far, far superior to socializing than he was.

Something flashed in the otter's eyes. It came and went so fast that Lukan couldn't register what it was. "Can I test something on you then? And if I can, promise me you won't hate me if you don't like it?" he asked, placing both his paws on Lukan's arms.

Lukan looked right into the otter's eyes. "I promise."

In that split second, Lukan had not even remotely expected what the otter had done next; it shocked him from ear tip, to fingertip, to tail tip, to toe tip. The otter moved closer, closing his eyes, and before Lukan knew it, the otter had planted his muzzle right against Lukan's. Lukan almost yelped in surprise and pulled back, but his body could only manage an involuntary jerk. Klaus had his lips locked with Lukan's. Lukan could feel the otter's warm breath on his own. It only lasted for a few seconds before the otter pulled back.

Lukan momentarily realized he just had his first kiss and was mesmerized by that and the fact that--!

"Um...? H-how was that...?" Klaus asked, completely flustered and blushing brightly.

Lukan blinked, maw still open. Had the otter...?! Lukan was then distracted by a warm sensation building up inside him. What--!? He felt himself flushing furiously, almost if not more brightly than the otter. "I-I..."

Klaus looked worried. "No?"

Fuck it. Lukan only knew one thing. Just one thing. Only one thing in his mind was clear. And he no longer even wanted it hidden from the otter any longer now that the otter had done as such. "J-just kiss me again, you silly otter...!"

Instantaneously, the otter's eyes lit up, shining brightly like an emerald held against the sun. He smiled wider than at any other point Lukan had ever seen him, and the otter wasted no time and had no hesitation as he locked lips with Lukan once more, kissing him more eagerly than before. Lukan felt the warmth flood inside his body again as the otter embraced him, just as he requested. The warmth was so much stronger than when the otter merely hugged him or touched his fur or anything like that. Lukan finally felt he was coming to terms with how he felt with the otter. Love. Love was the answer. That's what that feeling was. And Klaus knew it.

Lukan practically broke the kiss out of surprise. "Oh my God!" he exclaimed, wide eyed.

"Wh-what!?" Klaus breathed, just as flustered.

"D-does that mean I'm gay?!" Lukan wheezed out.

Klaus failed to stifle a giggle, if he was even trying. "Well? What do you think?"

Lukan did not think there was a point even responding to that. For the first time in as long as he could remember, he knew exactly what all of this means now. And he liked that fact.