

Seven. Silver Reality

There was no time to hide. No time to run. Lukan knew that he was about to come face to face with Klaus' ex boyfriend in just a few seconds. Awkward situations that were to inevitably arise from happenings such as this were one of the things Lukan wanted to avoid the most. But true to the rest of his life's history, such garbage always finds him, one way or another.

"You...!" Klaus was the first to speak among the three, however. Platt stopped in his tracks and looked at them. Lukan did not like the way his eyes read them.

"Oh. It's you," he said completely and utterly emotionlessly. He did, however, seem much more calm than on the day Lukan had seen him before. But the way the silver wolf seemed was completely off putting. Was it just how apathetic he seemed, or was it something else...? "What are you doing here?"

Klaus took a hard step forward. "Having a stroll with my new boyfriend!" Klaus spat flatly. Lukan instantly wanted to try and calm the otter down; he was getting more worked up than the raccoon was comfortable with. If the situation was not awkward enough already, it most certainly would become so the more the otter egged the wolf on like that.

"Your new... This raccoon here?" Platt pointed at Lukan. Lukan felt a huge chill go down his spine when he did that. And it wasn't because of the cold breeze.

"Yes!" Klaus stomped his paw. "But I should be the one to ask. What are YOU doing here, Platt?!" he demanded.

"K-Klaus, I think you should calm down!" Lukan hissed, grabbing at his arm. But the otter would not back down.

Platt seemed completely uninterested in the otter's angry demands. He kept his eyes fixed on Lukan. "Listen, raccoon. If you really are this otter's boyfriend now, there are some things I would like to warn you about."

Klaus suddenly looked like one had shot his family right in front of him. "Excuse me?! Warn him about me now?!"

However, Platt completely ignored him once again. "Hm... case in point it seems."

Klaus looked so intensely angry that Lukan could swear steam was billowing out of every orifice on the otter's head. "What do you mean by case in point?!" he bellowed out. Lukan started feeling incredibly uneasy about the situation. He was tempted to run, but he did not want to just leave the otter there with the wolf.

"Hmph. I guess now that we aren't together anymore, Klaus here doesn't feel the need to restrain himself any longer. Like I said. Case. In. Point." Platt's voice was as

emotionless as it has been since the start, however it seemed more firm and unwavering.

"A-are you talking about Klaus' emotions?" Lukan stammered out. Now that he thought about it, the otter's emotions seemed to be unusually wild and unpredictable. It was as if--

"He's bipolar. At least a little bit. He'll switch out emotions like girls do with their cell phones," Platt explained. "I broke up with him because he started using all that as an excuse to start asking more than he should have from me."

"Th-that is not true, you liar!" the otter cried out. "We broke up because of you being an ungrateful and selfish ass!"

"Temper," Platt said simply, holding up a paw. "It was I who called it off, was I not?" he continued.

"Temper, says the wolf who exploded that break up so that Lukan was able to hear," Klaus growled.

"Ahhh that's why this coon is familiar. I assume you met when you decided to console him, then," Platt turned to Lukan again, who suddenly felt very small between these two warring exes. When Lukan nodded, Platt pressed on. "If you knew who this otter really was, then perhaps you might have chosen differently."

"D-don't you dare be trying to get Lukan to break up with me, you bastard!" Klaus snarled, losing most of the coherence in his voice.

Platt shrugged. "I have no interest in that sort of thing. I'm just telling Lukan here to just be careful with you. That's all," he said. "Is this your first relationship, raccoon?" When Lukan nodded, Platt went on. "I see.... Oh, and as for me being so loud with the break up thing. That's build up from all the years I put up with your shit."

"Y-years!? Don't tell me you never wanted me in the first place?!" Klaus cried out incredulously.

Platt shrugged again. "I did want you. Until I met you in person and saw who you truly were, that is. Such a shame. Creatures always present themselves so much more differently online rather than who they really are, whether by intention, or not."

Klaus was fuming. Absolutely livid. Lukan was convinced that the otter was going to attack Platt right there and then. "You know what!? I'm glad you broke up with me! At least you did it before I got to propose to you, you swine!"

Lukan felt his eyes go wide. Platt's monotone was shattered. "What?!" he exclaimed.

"I... I was going to propose to you on that day! I saved up the money for the ring since day one in Lilac Grove. That's... why my family and I still have not financially recovered since moving here..." he muttered, anger completely deflating as his memories seemed to wash over him. "You wouldn't believe how excited I was when gay marriage was legalized here... All for you. But not anymore."

"If you think that changes anything, well it doesn't. I do apologize for not dumping you sooner so you could have at least put that money to better use," Platt responded unsteadily. Lukan pondered. This wolf did not seem quite as heartless as Klaus was letting on. What was going on?

"Y-you say that as if breaking my heart sooner would have been a good thing!" Klaus exclaimed in disbelief.

"It's bad to prolong things," Platt countered swiftly. "It's never good to let things go on longer than they should. You wasting money on an engagement ring is proof of that." Ouch. Really cold. Not quite heartless. Just icy and bitterly cold. Possibly colder than the winter that was looming in the future.

"No! Breaking my heart is still breaking my heart, regardless of when you do it! It's unforgivable!" Klaus' anger was rising again.

"You can see it any way you like," Platt said simply. "You perceptive on reality was always different from mine. Maybe that's what doomed us from the start." And without even waiting for Lukan or Klaus to say anything, Platt started to walk past them. He looked at Lukan as he passed, and said. "Listen, coon. I dunno who you are, but, I do want you to be careful with Klaus. He's a fragile one. And easy to get to him. I don't mean to come off as Klaus stated. I do hope you two are compatible. But considering him, I wouldn't count on those odds. Even more so if this is your first relationship. First loves almost never work out. It didn't for me, nor him. All I will say is good luck, coon." And with that, he started to leave the new couple's presence. Klaus was not having it.

"Hey you get back here! Platt Rivers!" But he was gone. And the otter was snarling.

There was a long pause. Lukan was not entirely sure what to say. "You... need to control that anger, Klaus," Lukan finally said after several seconds of awkward silence.

Klaus let out a deep sigh. "I'm sorry. It's just, whenever I think of him anymore, I get really, really pissed off. Seeing him in person though really set me off."

"It's weird though," Lukan noted. "It's like the opposite of when we met. He blew up then, but today you did," he explained.

"I guess..." Klaus shrugged. "Anyways, I really wouldn't listen to him. I bet you my last dollar that he's trying to get us to break up."

"But what did he mean by what he said though?" Lukan was confused.

Klaus sighed. "I don't really know," he said. "I'm just glad he's gone."

"Does he live nearby?" Lukan pondered.

"Sadly he does. He lives on Meadowlark road, which runs alongside mine," Klaus stated. "Did I mention I wanted to get a house as close to his as possible? Yeah..."

"I see. Hey uh... Klaus?" Lukan suddenly thought of something.

"Yes, Lukan?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course. Anything for you, my coonie."

"What was Platt on that gay teens site for, if you don't mind me asking?"

Klaus seemed surprised. "Why would you want to know something like that for?"

Lukan shrugged. "Just curious I guess."

Klaus sighed again. "Well, I dunno if he wanted what happened on his end to be hidden or not, but it is something that sadly happens to a lot of gay teens out there. He was disowned by his family and forced to move in with friends."

"O-oh..." Lukan said. What was he expecting though? Sunshine and rainbows? Well rainbows. Maybe. But of course what that knowledge was wasn't going to be even the slightest bit positive. "I-I can't imagine what it must be like to go through any of the shit you guys have..."

"You think what we went through is worse than what you have?" Klaus queried.

"I... do actually," Lukan admitted.

"Well, feel free to tell me, if you'd like?" Klaus offered, as he sat down on the rock. It felt exactly like the day they first met. But with much more depressing looking flora.

Lukan took a deep breath. "Okay. I'll tell you."

"So you know what happened eight years ago right? When I was 11? The economy went complete and total bust all over the country? Well, my mom and I were also casualties of all that shit that went down as a result. She lost her job, and we lost our home. I was at least able to finish 5th grade before our ship sank. I was faced with an option. To either go live in a homeless shelter, or, go live with a couple of friends of my mom's in Bright. You know. The town not even far from where you used to live? Well..." Lukan trailed off, taking a shuddering breath.

Klaus took a hold of Lukan and hugged him close. "I'm listening, my coon. Don't worry..."

Lukan felt more confident in the otter's arms. "I obviously, yet unfortunately, chose to move to Bright. I mean yeah. It was probably the best option. It does seem that way. But uh... Turns out these creatures we lived with. They... weren't the greatest people to live with. No they did not abuse me. Or assault me. They only really threatened us that if we did not do as they wished, we would end up back onto the streets in no time. And we'd become the stereotypical raccoon trash some creatures think of. Well, they did not ask for much really. Just to help them with recycling. Which uh... require dumpster diving in the 100 degree sun, by the way." Klaus let out an audible disgusted grunt. "Things did not really get bad until that July, a month and a

half after we had moved there. And you know what, but this is going to sound so dumb. But it was because of what they made for dinner one night."

Klaus tilted his head. "What does a coonie mean?"

"Something they included. I am horrifically allergic to. Like, enough of it may kill me or disable me at least. And you know... I had no choice but to eat it, ya know? They would not have it any other way," Lukan explained, trying his damndest not to sound stupid.

"Oh God... What happened to you?" Klaus actually seemed genuinely concerned.

"I was sick for months. It seriously did some damage to me that I don't think I completely recovered from yet even now," Lukan said.

"What exactly...?" Klaus started.

"Y-you don't want to know. Trust me. It was... Just terrible. All nine months of it. And, let's just say it made school that much more difficult when that rolled around the next month. It was bad enough that the worst bully I ever had to deal with was there, but the teachers weren't much better. Well, my math teacher was cool. That bitch of a PE teacher was the worst by far though. Wouldn't take my illness seriously, and made me do the work that we both knew would set me off. I feel like she does that sort of shit on purpose. Threatened me with suspension if I did not get in line, even if I was literally about to spew my guts out everywhere. Heh. My mom and I almost sued that school. I do wonder if we could have though... A-anyways, I had a horrible panic attack the day after I had a bad health attack that uh..." Lukan sighed. He lost his confidence again.

"Wh-what...?" Klaus said in almost a whisper.

"They... deemed me mentally unstable, and replaced my PE class with one for disabled students. Well, I was glad to be out of that class for good, but... I was not mentally disabled. At least, not on the level of some of the kids in that class. ...I really dunno how to put that in a way that doesn't sound mean. Ugh..."

Klaus gripped his arm tighter. "Don't worry. I know what you mean."

"Thankfully from there the story gets better. Well, except I was diagnosed with depression in late September. That sucked. But my physical health was slowly coming back thanks to meds I had to start taking. In November, my mom and I finally managed to leave Bright. It was close though. Her friends' landlord found out we were staying there without being on the lease and they were about to kick us out too. Not even at the will of her friends at all. We moved to Castoria. You've heard of there right? It's 25 miles east of Lilac Grove. Lived there for a couple years. Five months after moving, my health finally became comfortable enough to you know, live with, again.

"It's just that... given everything that happened while we lived there, I just simply... lost faith in everyone. I felt that no one could be trusted ever again. Especially myself. Because I was the one who made that decision to move to Bright. I always

blamed myself for every last second that happened down there. So I just decided to shut myself out of the world whenever I could. Built my coon shell, as you would say. I decided, that if even points of authority who are meant to be able to be trusted can't, then absolutely no one can."

"And would you say that was worth it? Building your coon shell that is?" Klaus asked, voice quavering heavily.

Lukan nodded. "Honestly, yeah I would. It kept me out of trouble. Of course, I never really did anything that was any fun throughout my teenage years, but..."

"Now I have given you a reason to destroy that coon shell, haven't I?"

Lukan nodded again. "Exactly. If this is what I was missing out on all these years, then I have to ask myself. What the hell have I done? Maybe it wasn't actually worth it after all. I dunno."

Klaus smiled a little. "Well, all of that is over now. Because now you got me. But... I am sorry about what you went through."

Lukan gave the otter a lick on the cheek. "I still think what you and Platt went through was worse though. I dunno what I would have done in those situations at all."

"T-to think that I was being molested by my uncle at the exact same time that all this was happening to you, just makes me wonder how fated that is," Klaus observed, eyes wide.

"I dunno if I believe in fate all that much, but... it is freaky that that is true," Lukan said. "Within ten miles of each other at the time too. It's just crazy!"

"Small world. And to think it's only getting smaller," Klaus affirmed. He sighed. "Life can be so cruel sometimes..."

Lukan's ears twitched. What was that? An instinct? "Klaus? Did you hear something?" he asked.

"I hear only the breeze in the leaves, Lukan," Klaus replied.

"Sorry. I am just... a bit paranoid. A side effect of what happened to me those years ago. I still don't fully trust anyone really," Lukan shrugged. Klaus hugged him, shielding him from the cold breeze. The embrace made Lukan feel much safer.

"You trust me. Right?" Klaus seemed worried.

"Absolutely! With my life!" Lukan exclaimed to reassure him.

"Well, no matter what happens. Despite all the trials that are ahead of us right now. Like Platt for example, we'll get through them together! Right?"

Lukan grasped the otter's hand. "Without a doubt!"

Lukan and Klaus spent the next hour or so wandering around the park, discussing their ideas and plans for the future ahead. They held each other close, not only for each other's love, but also for each other's warmth. As the fall season went on deeper and deeper, so did the colder temperatures. There were hardly any other

creatures in the park, so Lukan did not have overpowering qualms about cuddling up to his boyfriend in public. One thing he was concerned about that he had yet to bring up to Klaus at all was that Lilac Grove was a relatively intolerant place. Wasn't incredibly religious or conservative, but enough so to raise alarms in Lukan's mind about the prospects of being gay. Especially in public. Lukan had always been wary of other creatures, whether they seemed friendly or not. Being gay probably made that misanthropy even worse. And yet, Lukan still held a small desire to break his coon shell, if it meant that doing so would lead to other exhilarating and liberating things like a relationship with Klaus. Lukan never wanted too much excitement in his life. But if Klaus had proved one thing, it's that Lukan did not know jack shit about what he wanted in life. He hoped that Klaus would help him discover more things he would otherwise have known about if he just hadn't built his coon shell to seclude himself.

Lukan and Klaus talked about moving out of Lilac Grove entirely one day and moving to the country. Living in the outskirts of town so they could easily see the stars at night. It sounded so lovely to Lukan, being far away from the bustling cities and towns he was so used to. He didn't want to be too far away, though. He couldn't imagine having to drive to work or stores for over an hour a piece every time they needed to. But the idea of being farther away from other creatures did make him feel hopeful.

Having such prudent thoughts for the future, however, had made Lukan realize something important. "Hold on!" he exclaimed stopping completely in his tracks.

"Wh-what is it!?" Klaus matched his explanation, not hiding both concern and curiosity in his voice.

"W-we've been boyfriends for a few weeks now... and we haven't even gone on a date yet! I-isn't this like, a rite of passage for most couples or something!?" Lukan breathed.

Klaus giggled. "You dork. We don't have to go on a date to be together," he said.

Lukan kissed Klaus softly. "I know. But I just want to do that. I mean uh... it is all kinds of public and well..."

"Oh don't worry. I know that since you're just that untrusting, you would think PDA, especially between a pair of gay lovers, would be a very, very bad idea. That's why I say we don't actually HAVE to go on dates. Your company is all I need," Klaus said in a loving and sweet voice.

"PDA?" Lukan scowled. He knew it was obvious. It always was!

"Public displays of affection," Klaus clarified. Lukan knew it would be obvious. And Lukan did not like that idea very much either at all. "You're... kinda doing that when you kiss me here," he continued with a light blush on his handsome face.

"I know. There's just never really anyone here. That's why I come here a lot. This park is only ever busy after school gets out, and that's for just, an hour maybe?" Lukan explained his reasoning. He just hoped it made sense.

Klaus nodded. "You're such a silly coon. Maybe we could take a trip to the mountain too. That would be fun."

"Ohh I really want to, but ya know. Too far away. Can't drive. Mom can't handle the altitude change very well. But that would be great. You'll be able to see all of Lilac Grove from up there..." Lukan was rambling. What? Lukan never did that before!?

"Why the hell would anyone in their right mind want to see all of this hickhole all at once?!" Klaus exclaimed in both disgust and incredulity.

Lukan shrugged. "It's a romantic spot."

"Yeah, one with a shit view," Klaus narrowed his eyes.

"Wow, you really hate this town that much?" Lukan was surprised at the otter's sudden change in tone.

"Loathe it. It's taken so much from me..." Klaus muttered.

"It's given you me," Lukan prompted, placing a hand on the otter's shoulder.

Klaus sighed. "It's the only good this place has ever done. I really want to get out of here with you someday..."

"We will. I promise. Until then, we're stuck here. We just have to put up with that," Lukan said. "By the way, have you heard back from the store yet? The faster we raise money, the sooner we can leave!"

"Yeah, they called yesterday. They want to interview me tomorrow," Klaus replied.

"Awesome! What position?" Lukan pressed, feeling more excited about the idea of working with his boyfriend. Doing so would make the job so much more bearable... Except for. Eira Farus Tharo.

"Truck unloader and stocker. Looks like it'll be an afternoon and evening thing," Klaus replied.

Lukan nodded. "They start about the same time I do. Although it looks like you're gonna possibly work full time. That's both good and bad..."

"More good I'd say," Klaus said certainly. "Means more money, and being much closer to waving goodbye to this place."

Lukan cuddled into Klaus' short fur and said sadly, "But that means I get to see less of you when you're working and I'm not."

Klaus pet Lukan's fur softly. "Don't worry, coonie. I'll make sure we get to see each other more often. I promise you that."

"I won't leave the store until you get off then! Just to make sure that happens!" Lukan declared.

"What? And give me all kinds of PDA while I work? Are you sure that's a good idea?" Klaus teased, poking the raccoon's nose. "You're so silly. Who knew a coon like this was buried underneath that hard coon shell of misanthropy?"

Lukan flushed as he always did when Klaus said stuff like this to him. "Why must you keep teasing the coon?"

"Because he is my adorable and silly boyfriend," Klaus was completely and utterly relentless. Lukan had no hope!

"Staaahhp!" Lukan protested. But it seemed as though the otter would never stop. The battle was going quickly downhill for the poor raccoon!

Klaus kissed Lukan right on the lips for a brief moment. "Case in point," he said. "I just love everything about your face. Your eyes. Your mask. Everything."

Lukan giggled. "Okay okay, I get it. I'm starting to get used to it now."

Klaus looked only somewhat defeated. "Ah man! I swear I'll find new ways to fluster my beautiful coonbutt! Just you wait!"

Lukan couldn't believe what was happening in his life anymore. It didn't feel real. It was as if everything has changed. Lukan knew that for a fact that everything has changed. The idea of leaving Lilac Grove sent tingles of excitement into his tail. He wondered what the future would hold, and he hoped that it would remain as bright as it did in that moment.