

Eight. Enigmatic Request

"I got it! I got the job!" came the sudden exclamation from the familiar and beautiful voice that Lukan had always enjoyed hearing. Klaus came running right at Lukan, just as the procyon was finishing yet another annoying day at work. Eira was back to her old self and constantly pestering him about his personal life where only the otter belonged. The creature nearly barreled into Lukan as he approached him, waving around pieces of paper.

Lukan yelped in surprise as he saw his boyfriend nearly colliding into him and recoiled, only for the thick tailed creature to barely stop in time to avoid that.

"C-careful you silly thing!" Lukan exclaimed as he tried to catch his breath.

"S-sorry. It's the damn piercing," Klaus said sheepishly. Lukan could not help but think that was just an excuse. The otter at least SEEMED steady on his paws even with the holes in his tail. "But I did it! I've been hired! Orientation will be on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving!"

Lukan smiled at the otter. "Congratulations! And welcome to hell!" he added light heartedly. Although he knew exactly what the otter was going to say next.

"But... I've been there for nearly six years already," Klaus frowned. "Ah... It is better than living with that uncle though at least."

Lukan nodded. "It absolutely would be. I don't hold this town highly either, but it's a helluva lot better than Bright. I just wish there was more things to do here. It's all outdoorsy stuff or the oil industry. Pfft."

Klaus nodded firmly. "This absolutely is true. This place needs a club or something..."

Lukan was somewhat aghast. "Ew. A place to be social is not for coons in coon shells. Also what the hell? We're not even 21 yet!"

"I will be in January!" Klaus beamed.

"Is that right? I won't be until December. Next year," Lukan muttered.

Klaus gave Lukan a lick. Giving him PDA... Lukan tried not to blush and hoped no one was looking. "Aww poor coonie. You'll be there before you know it! In fact, not long until your 20th is it?"

"With November being nearly over soon, yeah," Lukan nodded. "It's a shame we couldn't do anything for Thanksgiving..."

"With the rest of my family in as big of shambles as they are, I couldn't," Klaus started.

"And with me not even knowing almost all of mine, I couldn't either," Lukan finished.

"Well, at least I am certain of one thing," Klaus stated.

"What would that be?" Lukan tilted his head.

"You are a part of my family now, of course. Silly coonie," Klaus giggled.

Lukan most certainly did blush brightly at this. "A-aww... You are a part of mine too... But uh... Why are you bothering the coon at work? You should be careful in case a manager comes by." Lukan suddenly remembered his job, of which he realized he was not doing because of the king of distractions. "I-I mean I am done in just ten minutes, but uh..." he trailed off, not sure where he was going with that.

"I wanted to let you know that I got the job, is all," Klaus insisted. "I'll let the coon continue cooning up the place, then." He stuck out his tongue before turning tail and walking the other direction. Lukan watched as his beautiful slender tail wave back and forth, the piercing following him where he went. The ridiculous creature couldn't even wait ten minutes to tell the raccoon about his successful endeavor in getting a job. So far things really were going to plan.

A flash of yellow had entered the edge of Lukan's vision, causing Lukan to swivel his head quickly to see the same yellow creature he had seen when he and Klaus gotten themselves in that intimate situation. He was much closer this time so Lukan was able to discern that he was a fox, about as tall as he was, with a long tail. He was looking right where Lukan was, but the raccoon couldn't figure out if he was looking at him or not. The vulpine's face looked intense. Deep. As if he were focusing on something intently. Lukan felt something he never felt before. He felt tempted to go and try to confront the golden furred creature. He couldn't tell if the fox even knew he was looking at him. Suddenly the fox turned his head, and swiftly started to move along the aisles, and then out of sight. Something or someone had caught his attention. Lukan felt a spark of curiosity. What was that all about?

"Lukan? What are you staring at?" That was Eira's voice. Somehow Lukan even knew it before his mind was snapped back to terra firma.

"I am not even sure," Lukan said absentmindedly.

"Well, it's just about time to get off for ya it seems," Eira noted. Thank you captain obvious. "I saw that otter again. Klaus was it? He seemed pretty excited."

"He's just got hired here," Lukan stated, still having the other fox in his mind.

"And he's excited about that!? Should we call an ambulance to get his brain emergency scanned?" Eira went wide eyed and incredulous.

"He's more excited about the money he'll make so we'll get out of Lilac Grove that much sooner." Lukan realized a picosecond too late exactly what he ended up saying. God dammit. Stupid ass coon.

"Leave Lilac-- Did you say 'we'?!" Eira exclaimed. "What's this conspiracy going on here?" she asked, becoming all sly. Lukan hated it when she did that.

"Good God!" Lukan exclaimed, thoroughly exasperated now. "It is none of your business Eira! Can we not do this again, like we do every day it seems?!"

"Ringtail I--"

"Miss. I insist that you leave this raccoon alone. As you can see in his eyes, he does not want you around at this moment in time."

Lukan nearly jumped out of his fur when he heard a new and completely unfamiliar voice. It wasn't Klaus. It wasn't his supervisor. It wasn't any manager. Lukan turned and looked, only to be face to face with the golden furred fox from moments ago. "O-oh..." he let out. He internally chastised himself as always.

"You cannot tell me what to do!" Eira remained defiant at the stranger. She looked at Lukan. "And you! I thought we were friends!?"

Lukan shrugged. "Hard to be with your nosy ass trying to get up in my business." Lukan realized a zeptosecond too late just how wrong that sounded.

Eira looked completely indignant. "Fine! Keep your secrets then! I'll find that otter and ask him myself!" she huffed, and puffed out her chest, before strutting away. Lukan did not like the thought of her annoying his boyfriend again. It made him feel angrier than it probably should have.

"She's a tenacious one, isn't she?" the fox prompted, turning to Lukan.

"You have no idea," Lukan emphasized.

"I've seen you around a couple of times. Forgive me if I seem as nosy as that other fox was, but I couldn't help but wonder about you."

"A-about me?" Lukan was dumbfounded that the young fox would say something like that. And he noticed the raccoon around too? Lukan inconspicuousness was failing miserably. Was it because of the otter tearing apart his coon shell? Uh oh...

"My name is Aero Novara," the fox introduced himself, giving a small bow.

"I uh... I'm Lukan... Benka," For a brief moment it felt like Lukan completely forgot his name.

"Ah Lukan. A fine name that is," Aero said, almost like the otter had said. Lukan suddenly wondered if he was trying to... "I'm just wondering, by any chance, have you seen a snow leopard around here?"

A snow leopard? Creatures such as them weren't particularly common around these parts. They tended to live in mountain towns, with Lilac Grove was not, despite having one to the south. But in all other directions were endless brown grasslands. "Not recently," he said. "I hear most of them in Lilac Grove live up on the mountain."

"Hm... Just let me know if you see one with bright cyan colored eyes, okay? He also has heart shaped spots on his wrists and ankles. Should be easy to spot," Aero said enigmatically.

"Wh-what? But why...?" Lukan was completely and utterly confused.

"It's too complicated to go over now, just please can you do this favor for me, please? I did chase off that nosy vixen just now right?" Aero pressed. He seemed like he was in a hurry. This was all completely suspicious.

"I mean, sure, but how would I contact you if I see someone like that?" Lukan stupidly asked, trying to piece together what was even happening.

"I mean, I can give you my contact info. Don't worry about giving me yours. I just want you to notify me if you see him."

Lukan complied cautiously, accepting the paper that the fox gave him, but he still wanted to know what was going on here. "O-okay, but I still want to know why this is happening and why you're asking me to do all this..." Lukan was starting to remember why he built his coon shell. To keep out weirdos like this. Curiosity had now turned to concern.

"It's just someone I am looking for in this town is all," the fox insisted, not looking at Lukan. Lukan wondered if it was like how Klaus may have been looking for Platt when he first moved here. But if that were true--

"You still haven't clocked out yet, Lukan? Come on, silly creature! Let's get you home!" the otter was waving at him from several feet away. "Although that Eira character found me, and well, it was really hard to shake her. Seriously, what's wrong with her!?" Aero had vanished, and Lukan was left to wonder what the hell just happened.

"I uh... uh..." Lukan lost all his cohesion due to sheer confusion as to what had just happened. "Wh-where did...?" The otter walked up to him, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"Uh oh, coonie is acting odd again... Want to tell your boyfriend about it?" Klaus said, sounding worried.

"Th-that yellow fox I saw the morning we uh... did you know... H-he was just here and well..." Lukan had absolutely no idea how to word what he wanted to say in the slightest. It was as if, once again, the entire encyclopedia of every language ever was lodged in his throat.

Klaus tilted his head. "Am I going to be this crazy when I start working here? Oh God, I hope not!"

Lukan shook his head. "He's... his... Aero." Lukan shook his head harder. There was no way it was taking him this long to regain his cohesion. "He asked me to look for a snow leopard." There we go.

Klaus frowned. "A snow leopard? There's not many of them this far south... But um... why, exactly?"

Lukan shrugged. "Beats me. Some creatures are real fucking weird sometimes, I swear. I mean, why else am I a misanthropist?"

"Because of well... Bright?"

"That's true, but... I dunno. I-I'll go get clocked out before I get accused of stealing time," Lukan said, still unsteady, before walking past Klaus to go and do just that.

"A snow leopard. With cyan eyes. And heart shaped spots on his wrists and ankles. Is that right?" Klaus asked moments later outside of the store once Lukan had finished up his business inside.

Lukan nodded, shivering slightly from the rapidly cooling temperature. The sun was already down as well. Lukan wasn't completely used to that yet. "That's what he said. What do you think that's all about?" Lukan also had not really thought of the fact that the fox just chose to up and vanish as soon as Klaus reappeared. That did strike a chord of suspicion in Lukan's mind.

"Ooh maybe one is a drug dealer and the other--" Klaus stopped himself, likely realizing how ridiculous that sounded.

"I highly doubt that, silly creature," Lukan giggled softly. "Hm..." Lukan tried to think of something, but failed to do so. No theories. No hypotheses. No ideas. At least none that would seem likely. Everything seemed as likely as one another. Which meant that nothing was likely at all.

"Seems to be a mystery," Klaus said in a suspenseful voice. "The mystery of the fox and the snep. Coming to a theater near you!"

"You complete and utter dork!" Lukan exclaimed, right in the middle of the parking lot, experiencing a complete lapse of judgment for where he was. Thankfully, only a few creatures looked his way before dismissing him completely. "Well," he said, trying to get his mind off what he just did. "Guess we'll just have to wait and see."

"Hey uh..." Klaus started.

"Uh oh, what is it?" Lukan was instantaneously worried.

"So my parents are getting a little wary of me staying over so much at your place..." Klaus started. Uh oh indeed. Lukan did not like where this was going at all. Klaus continued. "So they insist we flip it around, and you stay with us for a few nights," he finished sheepishly.

"Oh? But I've been wanting to visit my otter's home forever now!" Lukan replied brightly, happy and even more so relieved that it was going to happen, finally.

"Oh but I have warned you about Kandice, right?"

Lukan nodded. "Yeah, I mean. You keep saying that she's the reason you won't let me stay over and how you said that she is somehow even more annoying than Eira. I still don't believe that's possible by the way."

"Unfortunately, it seems that you will be finding out exactly what I mean in a few moments," Klaus stated darkly.

"Bring it!" Lukan proclaimed. "Though I will have to stop at my place to let my mom know where I am. You know how mothers can be sometimes."

Klaus nodded as they approached Klaus' ramshackled truck. "Yeah. I am just glad my mom cares about my happiness more than she cares about her own beliefs."

Though God forbid if she found out if we did things in her household, ooh. You wouldn't live to see the next sunrise!"

Lukan feigned his dismay as he climbed in the vehicle. The strong scent of otter that he loved so much slammed into his nostrils, melting away his stress instantly. "Aww... So no intimate fun times with otter boyfriend tonight?" He actually was at least a little bit dismayed at that despite the facade.

Klaus frowned as he started his truck. The engine sounded much more reluctant than it should when it sputtered into life. Lukan did not know much about cars at all, but this heap of metal did not seem like it was going to last too terribly much longer. "Sadly, we probably shouldn't. She says if I have to be gay, then I at the very least have to keep it out of the house. Not that she even knows you're my boyfriend. If she did, she probably wouldn't invite you over so keenly."

Lukan dipped his head and nodded in understanding. "Well it's better than well..." he trailed off.

"What the other members of my family have done? Yeah, that's true at least. I wish I had your mom though. She seems so open minded..." Klaus said, a strong hint of jealousy was flavoring his voice.

"I'm more worried about how much she'll never let me live all this down, knowing how I've been about stuff like this in the past," Lukan replied. "She even outright stated that she would prefer if I was gay!" he added.

Klaus seemed thoroughly surprised. So surprised that the otter almost slammed on the breaks. "Wait what?! But why exactly?"

Lukan shrugged. "She's been paranoid that I would potentially knock up girls when I was still a minor. Not that she would ever have to worry about that if I was straight, but you know. Or maybe she thinks I may make a terrible father." Even Lukan himself wasn't expecting his speculation to take such a pessimistic turn. Where did that even come from?!

"I think you wouldn't make for a terrible father..." Klaus tried to defend him.

"With my misanthropy and serious lack of patience? I uh... I doubt that to be honest." Lukan felt almost pained to admit that. But why?

"Well, maybe we can work on all that. As I am trying to break that coon shell of yours after all!" Klaus seemed unfazed by Lukan's pessimism. Lukan tried to determine how much of a good thing that was because of how strong his own pessimism could be at times.

Klaus nearly had forgotten that Lukan needed to inform his mom that he was going to stay at the otter's house that night. It felt weird for her to acquiesce to such an idea because of how overprotective she used to be with Lukan in the past, especially the younger Lukan was. Although she must have painfully come to terms that her son

wasn't a cub anymore and could take care of himself in regards such as these. Lukan could even note some sadness in her voice as she accepted the idea.

He rushed back out of his complex to return to the otter. The otter waited for him, footpaws on his dashboard. There seemed to be something off about the way he looked. Lukan couldn't discern what it was. It was like he had seen, noticed, or realized something odd. "What's up?" Lukan pondered, scowling.

"Um... Lukan? You might not believe this, but uh..." the mustelid was completely taken aback by something and as a result lost control of his speech. What? But that was Lukan's job! "A snow leopard came up to talk to me while you were gone!" he hissed.

Blood flow in Lukan's extremities accelerated. "What?! A-are you sure?"

Klaus nodded. "Dull gray blue fur, dark spots, cyan eyes. What else did that fox say he looked like?"

"Heart shaped spots on his wrists and ankles," Lukan recited his memory almost perfectly. "Did you really see him? What did he say?!"

"Well," Klaus replied shakily. "I did not see the heart shaped spots, but he said something about how I must be careful about what I perceive as real and fake as well as... my emotions. And how they're nothing but fabrications of the mind, and that they should be easier to control than I may have been letting on-- Lukan what does this mean? Does this guy know who the hell I am, and if so-- how?!" It was very clear that the otter was getting more and more distressed about what may have just happened.

Lukan blinked, his eyes widened. "I-I don't know. Wh-where did he go?" he looked around the complex parking lot. There were only a handful of other creatures from the other units going to and from their own vehicles. No sign of a snow leopard anywhere.

"I didn't even see," Klaus replied. "Lukan, I dunno what's going on, but it's kind of freaking me out just a little bit."

"Maybe Aero has some answers. He told me to message him the moment I found the snep. But it looks like you found him first," Lukan noted.

"W-well hurry up and do that!" Klaus demanded.

"I-I will have to use your computer when we get to your place? If that's alright?" Lukan asked, not sure how to calm the otter down.

Klaus nodded, biting his lips. "Whatever needs to be done, hon. I don't like this one bit. What if that snep is part of the government or something?"

Lukan shook his head. "Only to tell you what he did? I highly doubt that."

"I-I just want to know what all this means. I mean, what do these two creatures want with us in particular? What drew their interest? I just don't understand," Klaus seemed as though he was on the verge of panicking. Lukan somehow did not feel that way. He was worried about the situation, but as someone who always worried about

everything, it didn't affect him all that much. If anything, the procyon was more curious than anything.

"Then, let's go to your place and see if we can get some answers then," Lukan said firmly, stepping back into the otter's truck. Klaus, still biting his lips, nodded and started the truck.

Klaus seemed as if he did not even want to unlock the door to his own home. Lukan assumed it was because of his prior concerns with his sister. No seriously. Just how bad could she be. Lukan took a soft hold of the otter's wrist and guided it to the keyhole. He didn't say a word as he helped the otter unlock the door.

The door seemed to open by itself, and not by either of their volition. That was probably because the creature right inside the door when it opened was of a bright, smiling young otter girl. This was none other than Kandice Richtors, Klaus' little sister. "Big brother is home!" she squealed, running back inside.

"And so it begins," Klaus said, in a low, dark voice as he took a step inside. When Lukan followed, he was blasted with a mixed scent of several otters and food all at once. It washed over him, stronger than a tidal wave and threatened to knock him to the ground. Such unfamiliar scent made his head feel light and dizzy, reinforcing that threat. It would be so embarrassing to faint right in front of creatures that he had met only once before. The interior of the otter's abode was almost as shabby as the exterior looked. All the furniture looked like it was decades old, ripped and slightly stained. The walls were colorless and held sad looking pictures of the otter family. The lights were dim because they were covered with layers of dust on the inside of them. And yet, despite the bad look, it felt like a home to Lukan.

"It's been a while since we've seen you Klaus!" came the voice of an older woman. Klaus' mother. Lukan remembered her from Halloween when Lukan learned just how close Klaus lived. She said so in a teasing voice, indicating how Klaus always stayed at Lukan's every evening.

"You smell like a raccoon more than an otter," Kandice's nose wrinkled as she approached them again. Then she looked at Lukan with bright, sparkling eyes. Her eyes were just as vibrantly emerald as Klaus' were, but they seemed much more joyful and innocent than her brother's. "Is it because of him?"

"I'll tell you why when you're older," Klaus stated. "Now please go be annoying in your room."

"I AM older!" she pouted, circling the two of them.

"You're not at least twelve yet," Klaus noted. "That's when I will."

"B-but that's forever from now!" Kandice whined.

"Oh here we go..." Klaus rolled his eyes, looking right at Lukan, giving him an "I told you so" sort of look. Then he looked down at his sister again. "You'll be there

before you know it, now please don't be here?" he was trying retain his patience. Klaus was right. She seemed a lot like Eira, but not grown up yet. But more annoying than Eira? Impossible. At least one would expect this from a little girl, not a late teenage woman like Lukan's vulpine coworker.

"But I want to meet your new friend!" Kandice whined more annoyingly.

"You can meet him at dinner, sweetie, now go play in your room, now," said the otter mother from inside the kitchen. "We have to wait until your father gets home from work too. Speaking of which, how did your interview go, Klaus?"

"I got the job! Orientation is next Tuesday!" Klaus replied brightly, as Kandice stormed off looking very disappointed.

"That's good to hear, Klaus!" his mother said approvingly. "Maybe now we can make ends meet better, finally..." she added hopefully.

"A-are things really that bad?" Lukan piped up, worried for the otter's state of affairs.

She sighed. "Yeah they are. Klaus getting a job was something we seriously needed to happen. I'm about to lose all our health insurances, and Kuaren's hours keep getting cut..." she continued to ramble on about their terrible state of financial struggle. Lukan couldn't help but feel more and more sorry for them the more she went on about bankruptcy, debt, loans, and so on. Lukan dreaded the day he would have to be an adult on his own like that. It could not be pretty in the slightest.

"Klaus, you never told me things were that bad here..." he whispered to his boyfriend.

"W-we'll be alright. She's just as big a worrywort as you are," Klaus insisted.

"That's possible?" Lukan prompted.

"Anything is."

Lukan couldn't wait to see the otter's room. So his heart skipped a beat when he was introduced to where his boyfriend usually lived. But sadness hit him when he saw how empty it was. His bed and desk were just as shabby as the furniture in the rest of the house. The computer on top looked like it was from the dinosaur era. There was not a large variety of clothes inside his closet at all. Was this the real reason Klaus did not want Lukan to stay over? "Well..." Klaus said in a strained voice. "Let me get logged in so you can get Aero to answer our questions." Klaus sat down at the desk, chair making a loud creaking sound as he did. The computer took way longer than it should have to boot up. Lukan blushed slightly when he noticed that his background was of a male raccoon supermodel. Lukan was jealous that he wasn't nearly as good looking. Klaus pulled up his email. And stood up. "G-go ahead, Lukan." Klaus sounded thoroughly nervous, as if he wasn't sure he wanted the answers he told Lukan to seek out. Lukan momentarily wondered what would happen if he and Klaus were to ignore the

situation as a whole. Would nothing change or would they be better off if they did? Would things somehow be worse? Lukan shook his head. He was doing it again, overthinking everything as he always did. Lukan typed out the fox's email address, and then the message itself. All he said was that he himself had not confronted a snow leopard just then, but... was he to put his boyfriend or best friend? ...Did it matter? He opted to put best friend instead. He did not want to risk the fox being a total homophobic douchebag at all. He hoped that the otter wasn't watching him. Would Klaus be offended if he did not choose boyfriend over friend? Ugh. What to do, what to do about that? Lukan also mentioned what Klaus told him the cat said to him. When Lukan was finished, he hit the send button, hoping that this wasn't going to be a big mistake. He looked at Klaus with a blank expression, not sure what to be feeling at all.

It took only a few minutes for a response to pop up. Lukan wanted to not click on it, but Klaus was ahead of him, grabbing a hold of the mouse and clicking the message. Klaus read it aloud. "Yes. That has to be him. I know him. His name is Will. Let us meet at the Meadowlark Park tomorrow morning at eleven so we can discuss more of this in person. I'm sorry that you may be getting dragged into something like this, but you need to know what's going on. I hope to see you then." And that's all he wrote. "Damn it!" Klaus cursed. "No answers. I am not going to sleep well tonight..."

"I guess we'll see tomorrow then," Lukan shrugged.

"I don't like this," Klaus muttered.

Lukan lightly held up Klaus' chin and looked right into his eyes. "Remember what we said? About going through everything in life together? Let's uphold that promise!" he said, kissing the otter's nose softly.

Klaus seemed to calm down at his boyfriend's encouragement. "A-alright... I'm sorry. I have faith in you, you know?"

"I dunno what I am doing, but... I do what I can to make sure things will be alright," Lukan replied. "I'm sure it's not that big a deal."

"This Will guy sounds a lot like Platt used to..." Klaus observed. "I just hope you're right, Lukan."

The worst part about this though, was that Lukan wasn't sure he was right. Maybe Klaus' worriedness was justified. Yet, why was Lukan not as worried? Was it because he had someone to go through life with now? Was the solitude the reason he was always paranoid? Just what did all of this mean? The only emotion that Lukan knew for sure he shared with Klaus right now was the confusion. And despite the prospect of getting answers to attempt to quell it tomorrow, Lukan couldn't help but think the confusion was only going to get worse instead.