

Eleven. Expanding Rift

Lukan was home alone that night. It was the first night he had been alone since he was still technically single. Lukan wondered where the otter was going to go when he got off of work. He always came straight to Lukan's after work, once Klaus' family let him go back once they themselves met Lukan. Would the otter potentially go straight to his home now? What would he do in an awkward situation like this? What would Lukan himself even do? He supposed it would depend on how much he wished to reconcile with whom he fell out with, which in Lukan's case, was rather substantial. But what of the otter's case? Lukan shook his head, just hoping everything is okay. It was only one argument right? What kind of couple would they be if they broke up over just one argument?

Lukan examined the necklace the otter gave him twenty-four hours ago with a frown on his face. Now that Lukan was able to discern the symbol's shape... No. Lukan felt he was seeing things. For a moment he thought...

"Lukey?" That was Sarah Benka, distracting Lukan's mind. Well, at least he wouldn't be thinking about Klaus for the time being. "How's it going between you and Klaus?" Or maybe not. Crap.

"Um..." Lukan was not sure what to say. Things weren't going well, but he just wanted to be left alone, so he couldn't just tell her that. It was already bad enough having her in the know of what was going on.

"My boy is gay... I never thought it could be true..." But she said that in a proud and relieved voice. This woman... was so eerily like the opposite of the horror stories that one would hear from families like Platt's or even Klaus' to an extent. It put Lukan off, even if he was grateful for that fact. Lukan pretty much decided to tune her out and stride to his room so he could be alone, at least until the otter would possibly show up.

But the otter did not come to Lukan's apartment moments after the otter's shift was due to end. Lukan even waited, compensating for the downed truck. Maybe the otter was late getting out? Because he had missed over a third of his shift, they probably made him stay? Lukan mildly hoped that was the case. His mother came towards his room, curious as to why the otter had not come over as she had gotten used to expecting. Lukan fabricated the excuse that he was sick, and that just made Lukan not want Klaus to show up, only to keep his mother at bay.

Lukan worried for the otter. Klaus did say he liked the cold, but he seemed to have a small disdain for wintry air, like there was in the atmosphere that night. It may have been just barely under a week until winter's official start, but it most certainly felt like it was dead center and within the deepest gallows of the frozen season. Lukan

himself even found that the cold there was now was too much, even for him to stay out too long. Raccoons did not really have a winter fur like some creatures, such as foxes, did. Otters have it even worse.

Midnight came and went, signaling the calendar to switch over to December 17th. And there was still no sign of the otter anywhere. Lukan had to assume that his boyfriend went to his own home instead after work, which made Lukan feel immensely sad. He loved spending every one of his nights with the otter in his company. For that to have been taken away, for even a day, hurt. Lukan wasn't even sure why. It WAS only one night, and he was supposedly used to solitude. Lukan began to wonder now, just what was Klaus doing to him? And how has Lukan's own mind become so badly influenced by the mustelid? And more importantly, how could Lukan have let it happen so easily? Lukan remembered asking himself these questions the day the pair of them became boyfriends... But none other time seemed quite as poignant as now to ask himself them again. Why does Lukan feel he needed the otter? Why does it hurt to be alone right now? Was it because Lukan believed that the otter was really mad at him now? What does this all mean!? Lukan hated how inexperienced he was with relationships. Was this... why Platt seemed to believe first relationships never work? Because they would not understand the answers to these questions just yet? If this was the truth, then Lukan began to feel pessimistic about his future with Klaus. Lukan suddenly felt forebodingly depressed, like he believed that his relationship with Klaus was only going to deteriorate even further. No.. He couldn't allow that to happen. Despite what Platt believed, Lukan desired nothing more than to beat those odds. But what could he do to do just that? Well, first things first. Regain contact with the otter. Attempt to make amends. And simply, never let something get in between them again? Was it that simple? Why would that question even be asked; Lukan very clearly, already knew the answer.

It was a quiet morning. Too quiet. Lukan could not hear the sound of the otter's breathing right next to him. He could hear his body shift in his makeshift bed, nor the soft moans he made while he slept. They were gone. It had become such a routine for them at this point that it felt simply odd to be without it now. Lukan hoped it would really be just for one night...

No eating breakfast together either. No games. No anything like that today. Lukan was alone in the apartment, since Sarah left for work in the early morning hours. So what now, Lukan wondered? Suddenly Lukan completely forgot what he usually did by himself before he met the otter. Lukan wanted to walk right to the otter's house and beg for reconciliation. Lukan shook his head violently. No. That sounded so unlike him to do anything like that! Just... Just what was going on with his mind!?

Lukan took a deep breath. Yes. Going to the Richtors' home was an idea. But what should he say once he was there? Nothing rash, obviously. But what would qualify as such? Once again Lukan berated his social incapability. He swore that that was going to be his downfall, not misunderstanding the implications of mental changes in a relationship!

Lukan gasped when he left the apartment complex to go and see the otter family. It was bitterly cold outside. It was very easily below zero. It was like the Earth was flung further away from the sun by a more than decent margin. This was past Lukan's limit for cold temperatures for sure. Lukan felt the moisture in his nose begin to freeze. This was not okay in the slightest! Was it worth trekking that distance in such temperatures to see the otter? No. No it absolutely is. No doubts now. Lukan struggled to breathe in the beyond frozen air. Smoke billowed from every car as hot exhaust met mega frigid air. The snow under Lukan's paws somehow felt even colder than normal. And yet, Lukan insisted on surviving every winter with just his hoodie to keep him warm. Every year Lukan wondered why he constantly subjected himself to this.

As Lukan walked, he at least thanked his lucky stars that the wind was oddly absent from the tundra Lilac Grove has become. At that point, Lukan would seriously have had to reconsider even being outside let alone visiting anybody. Oh and there was work later that day as well. Lukan was more than tempted to call in. But after being late the previous day, he knew how precarious his employed situation would become as a result. Nope. Not worth the risk.

The snow on the sidewalk that connected Klaus' neighborhood to Lukan's apartment complex had fallen victim to snow drifting, and thus was over two feet deep in spots that Lukan could detect. Oh so there was wind previously! Wonderful... Lukan could only just catch himself whenever his entire leg became pit-falled by it. Winter was upon them. And there was nothing Lukan could do to prevent the death of his favorite season. It simply depressed him.

Lukan practically stumbled up to the Richtors' front door when he was finally able to reach them. Lukan was gasping for breath after frozen breath. Normally such a walk was no problem for the raccoon, but the snow! The snow just would not let his legs move without stupendous amounts of effort! Now Lukan really did not want to walk home in such awfulness... Maybe he should consider calling in for work?

Lukan knocked only twice because he felt that's all he should force himself to muster. There was a pause. It was breakfast time for the family, he would assume. Lukan forgot to factor in the possibility of interrupting something. Oops. Nevertheless, the door eventually opened to reveal Kristina Richtors.

"L-Lukan!? Wh-what on Earth are you doing outside like that!? Get your tail in here right now and warm up!" She seemed thoroughly shocked and dumbstruck at the idea that Lukan would do something like this to himself. At the same time, Lukan was

curious as to what he looked like in that moment, having braved the elements as he had. Did he even have a tail left, or did it freeze and then get chipped off his backside? Lukan couldn't even feel it anymore...

Kristina practically yanked the coon-cicle inside her home, and the temperature difference made Lukan gasp out again, this time, in relief.

"What's going on, honey?" came the voice of Kuaren Richtors from the dining area where the family always ate.

"Lukan has walked all the way here in these freezing temperatures outside!" Kristina replied incredulously as she closed the door to block the malignant air outside.

"It wasn't that far," Lukan tried to say, but found his voice oddly cracked and even somewhat slurred.

"A-any distance is too far in that mess!" Kristina countered as she ushered him to the kitchen. "I'm fixing you a hot cocoa this instant!" And she began to do just that.

While Lukan began thawing and the mother otter rummaged through the cabinets, he looked for Klaus at the dining table, and sure enough, there he was. He seemed to pay not much of a mind to what was happening around him. He looked thoroughly depressed as he sulkily prodded his food with his utensil. Lukan felt his heart drop in sadness at seeing the usually bright and happy otter being reduced to this. He found himself unable to find the right words to summon his attention.

Thankfully, Kuaren found a way to help.

"Lukan, by any chance do you know what my son is sulking so much right now? He won't tell us anything."

Oh boy... What should Lukan say to answer this question? Should Lukan admit that he may have made the otter mad and risk becoming a victim of their ire? Well, that was the truth after all... "Well, Klaus and I kinda argued a bit and..." Now what? Lukan wasn't even sure why his voice stopped, but it did.

"Oh I see," Kuaren responded simply. "You want to apologize for, isn't it?"

Before Lukan could reply, Kristina chimed in from inside the kitchen. "You've walked in that awful weather to do just that?" She still seemed incredulous.

Lukan did not want to admit how much Klaus meant to him. He felt that would send too strong an implication for their relationship if he were to do as such. "I-I have to go to work later, so sooner or later I would have to... You guys were on the way there, so I thought I would... apologize to Klaus first."

Kristina almost dropped the half made cocoa. "What!?"

Kuaren looked at Lukan with a warm look. "Don't mind my wife too much. She hates the cold more than anyone else in Lilac Grove," he said with a small laugh.

"Really? Well I love the cold!" Lukan exclaimed. Then he had to correct himself. "But yeah, even this cold is too much for me. But I have to deal with it." Lukan was forgetting his mission, and the reason why he was even there in the first place. He

looked right at Klaus. Klaus seemed to be pretending not to notice him. But it did not seem at all like the otter was mad at him. What was going on in his mind, Lukan wondered?

Kristina had strode from the kitchen, holding a cup of brown liquid. Hot cocoa. Lukan hadn't had that in years... Lukan took it, and almost yelped from how hot the mug was. "Th-thanks," he said, not daring to take a sip just yet.

The mother otter then directed her attention at Klaus. "Klaus, haven't you noticed? Your friend is here."

Klaus barely reacted at all, only taking his eyes, and directing them at Lukan for a few seconds before looking away again. "Cool," was the simple, uninterested reply. There was no way Klaus was acting this apathetic over one argument was he? Or was there something else that Lukan did not, or could not, factor?

Lukan's face fell. "Klaus..."

"I think we should go, perhaps?" Kuaren prompted, obviously detecting the awkwardness in the air as Lukan did. His wife nodded bluntly before the otter's parents swiftly left the room. It took Lukan a few moments to realize that they went into Klaus' sister's room.

Immediately, Klaus did speak. So he just didn't want to say anything in front of his parents. Lukan was at least somewhat relieved. "Lukan, I just want to know why you were suggesting that we go with that... that guy?" Klaus demanded in a soft voice.

"I-I know what Aero said. I just want to try to give all creatures a chance, you know? I hate assuming anything of anyone," Lukan earnestly replied.

Klaus' gaze hardened. "Says the coon who said he could not trust anyone, no matter how nice they seemed. What made you change your ways so quickly, huh?" His harsh tone... It hurt Lukan's soul with every word.

"Y-you did Klaus. You showed me that not everyone is inherently bad... And I want to keep that mentality in case I do meet more cool and nice creatures like you!" Lukan wasn't capable of keeping his voice steady. "A-and aren't you the one who was feeling sorry for Will since he is Platt's boyfriend now, right? That you were worried Platt was going to do something to him, and not the other way around?"

Klaus shook his head. "They're both bad," he said bluntly. "But no matter how bad someone is, they do not deserve to have their heart toyed with in any way shape or form whatsoever. It's a cruel thing to do to any living creature. Nevertheless, I do not like the looks of this Will guy one bit."

Lukan shook his head. "Honestly I dunno who to trust at all, since Will came to me at work last night and basically told me that I shouldn't trust Aero at all. Well, not directly, but foxes, pretty much."

"And do you believe him?" Klaus prompted.

Lukan shrugged. "I don't really believe either of them. I mean when I do think back... I haven't met a single genuinely nice fox at all. That bully and that PE teacher I mentioned back then were both foxes. Eira is a bitch among others..."

Klaus sighed. "Well... Okay. Fine. But please, let's just try to avoid both of them until we know for sure?"

Lukan shook his head. "And how would we ever find out for sure if we never communicate with them anymore? Creatures who can be trusted. Creatures who cannot. Sometimes you just can't tell the difference, until when you take a chance, and well... It's too late."

"I-I hate that," Klaus said flatly with an enormous scowl on his face.

Lukan boldly placed a paw on the otter's shoulder. The creature did not object. "It's... unfortunately how it is. If it weren't, don't you think I would have tried to find a way to not be so introverted all the time. Or built my coon shell?" He paused when Klaus gave him an enigmatic look at the mentioning of coon shell. "If there is a way, then I just wasted my entire adolescence without ever knowing it."

Klaus shook his head again. "I've never really ran into any problems with trust, other than within my own family anyways. I guess, not until now, when I found out what Platt was really thinking all this time. And now, there is Aero and Will..."

"You've had a lucky life in that regard then," Lukan noted.

"Have I taken it for granted?"

"I don't think so," Lukan replied. "If you did, you wouldn't be doubting Will so much, I'm sure."

Klaus took a deep breath. "Okay. Let's just... Try not to let those two guys get to us too much..." Klaus did not seem even remotely confident. Lukan did not like where this might go.

"Just... focus on us, Klaus. And our future together once we leave Lilac Grove for good. Getting out of this town also means getting away from them, doesn't it?" Lukan prompted, trying to give Klaus some sort of incentive.

Klaus only gave the raccoon a few nods. Lukan desperately hoped that Klaus truly understood where he was coming from, because he could tell that even despite their goals to evade Platt, Will, and Aero, it would be nearly impossible to do so.

The pair of them left for work early that day just in case the otter's truck was still not in operation. And true to their predictions, it was not. Klaus was still thoroughly unhappy at this fact. "Motherf--!" he flailed somewhat in the driver's seat, kicking underneath the dashboard. "Guess we do have to walk in this garbage weather..." he grumbled. "Mom would not like it at all if I did."

"Well, if we have no other choice." Lukan shrugged, looking around. "I don't see Will around to offer us a ride in whatever contraption he has that can handle weather like this."

"That... felt somewhat passive aggressive, not gonna lie," Klaus replied.

Lukan looked away. "Th-that wasn't my intention, I-I swear!" Despite not having eyes on the otter, Lukan could detect the unhappiness just billowing from the otter even stronger than his own body heat. "L-let's just go," Lukan jumped out of the truck, and into the outdoor freezer.

The walk to work was quiet. Awkward. It felt like the otter no longer enjoyed Lukan's company. It felt like the otter did not want to really be there at all. Like the otter was beginning to question all his decisions. In fact, Lukan dared himself to actually think that the otter just did not love him anymore. Were these suspicions true? Or was it that the otter just had way too much on his mind, despite Lukan requesting he stop focusing on all that, and focus on the both of them? Lukan hoped it was the latter... But if it was, Lukan felt hopeless and unsure of what to even do to help his boyfriend feel better. Maybe as long as those other three creatures stayed away from them both, things would improve? Lukan no longer had any idea.

Just before the two troubled lovers had entered the parking lot to their jobs, Klaus stopped dead in his tracks. "Wh-what the actual fuck is THAT!?" He sounded completely and unequivocally outraged. Lukan wondered what the otter was even talking about before he saw it.

Platt and Will. They were standing in the parking lot of the nearby fast food restaurant. They were kissing. In the open. In broad daylight. Giving no cares in the world to who may be watching. Complete and utter shameless example of PDA. They seemed to be going at each other rather hungrily. Zealously. As if it were all on purpose. For show. Not even like they didn't care, but they wanted other creatures to see. Lukan saw some nearby creatures, namely a buck and a cheetah giving them odd, potentially disapproving looks before going about their day. Klaus however, was not wanting even a moment of this.

"I... I need to go buy some eye bleach and a memory eraser now..." Klaus seethed, fists clenched. "How come you never kiss me in public?" he suddenly turned his rage onto Lukan, which one hundred percent caught him off guard.

"Wh-what?! B-but... I...! Lilac Grove! Homophobia!" More than just catching the raccoon off guard. Why would Klaus do something like this!?

"I don't give a rat's ass about what this city would think. Why do you?" Klaus replied coolly. Lukan had a feeling that this was supposed to be a simple question, but witnessing what Klaus had set him off like fireworks next to a fire.

"I-I..." Lukan stuttered, completely floored and speechless. "K-Klaus snap out of it!" he begged. "Don't you remember when I said I didn't really like the idea of PDA?"

Klaus looked like he was trying hard to regain composure, but he just couldn't. Lukan was hoping that Klaus was only acting like this because of how angry he was, and not that he actually felt this way. Lukan always knew that the otter needed to get better at controlling his emotions. Lukan knew that if one couldn't, then they lose control of themselves. "That bastard..." he growled. "This is why we need to avoid these cunts...!"

Lukan was taken aback by the otter's strong language. But... "I agree! So let's get the fuck out of here, especially before they see us!" he was tugging on the otter's arm.

Klaus dipped his head and took a hold of the amulet around the end of the necklace Lukan gave him just a couple days prior. "I swear one day, I will defy the actual meaning of this symbol..."

Lukan's ear perked. The otter had spoken it so quietly that he couldn't fully understand what he actually said. "Wait what?"

"Never mind. Let's just get today over with, shall we?" Klaus forced himself to say. It was still very clear to Lukan that the otter was still exceedingly upset. Lukan had said all he felt he needed to try and console the otter and help him calm down, but the otter just didn't seem capable of doing so. Why exactly does the idea of Platt and Will being together affect him so negatively? Lukan wished he understood his boyfriend. Not only because of what was happening now, but also because what Platt had told them when they met was still ringing in his ears. Suddenly the future ahead didn't seem quite as bright as it was just a couple days ago. He wished just as much as Klaus did that Platt and Will at the very least would leave them alone. Aero though... Lukan wondered what that fox's thoughts were about all this, despite Lukan's subconscious hesitation to fully trust that particular creature. What Aero would say about what both Will and Platt had told them both. His interpretations on the so-called Agent of Reality and his cryptic messages about trust, illusions, and manipulation. And even more so, what he believed Lukan and Klaus' chances were as a couple despite what Platt had said. Lukan felt odd even wondering that, but Lukan felt that he would feel better if he got another creature's opinion on all of this. But would Aero even be the right one to ask? He knew he could not ask his mother because her response would be yes, no matter what. Sometimes he felt his mother was a little too optimistic sometimes. Despite all doubts though, Lukan still held enough determination to stick it through all the trials and tribulations ahead and ensure that he and Klaus would retain that promising future they seemed to have just days before. He just hoped that the otter, or anyone else for that matter, wouldn't push it all away. Lukan dreaded even thinking about what life would turn into if that were to happen. And yet. Lukan held a subconscious thought that one way or another, he was going to find out exactly what

that sort of dark future entails. And that only fueled his determination to prevent it. He just hoped that the otter felt the same feelings towards that goal.