

Twelve. Reason

Time went by. Days. Weeks. A month? Or close to it? Lukan lost track. It felt like Christmas did not even happen. The New Year came and went. It all passed Lukan by so quickly, that he did not even have time to react. In that time, it did not truly feel like Klaus and Lukan's relationship ever did return to the way it was before they had met the enigmatic triad of characters that were Aero, Will, and Platt. In fact, Lukan dared to think that the relationship was starting to go further and further downhill. Neither of them felt compelled enough to gift each other anything when Christmas came by. Whenever they had their intimate, romantic and sensual moments, they felt forced and illegitimate. Not genuine. Forced. As if Klaus did not really love him anymore. And Lukan was finding it hard to believe that he himself loved Klaus anymore because of how distant the otter was becoming. He did not truly believe the otter did not love him. He believed that the otter just had too much on his mind regarding Platt and Will. So that did fuel some of Lukan's reserves of hope. Although... If Klaus DID truly love Lukan, he would have at least attempted to adhere to Lukan's wishes and tried to push away those qualms from his head. Or was it simply that the otter was just not mentally strong enough to do so? Lukan desperately hoped that would not be the case. He had a bad feeling about what that meant for their relationship in the future.

Now that they have entered the dead of winter, AKA mid-January, a notoriously rough time of year when it came to the weather, Lukan also found it hard to continue working at his job. The piling snow. The blustery winds. And the bone chilling temperatures. They created a perfect storm that halted Lukan from having an easy to trek to the otter's house, let alone his job! Nevertheless, Lukan persevered through it, finding it tough to even do his job when he got there due to his depleted energy. Well, with the holidays over, at least his bosses were no longer unreasonably overbearing as they were when Christmas was in the immediate future. But with the season now being nowhere near as busy as it once was, hours were being cut for both Lukan and Klaus. Lukan was already part time, so now his hours were minimal. He feared that he would be fired in due time if they got cut much more.

The troubled lovers also only saw Aero, Will, and Platt a seldom few times as the time went by. Every time Lukan and Klaus saw them, they were at a distance, and they couldn't communicate. Platt and Will were together, just as they saw them just several hours after Lukan's birthday and Klaus of course took it just as poorly as ever, expanding the rift between him and his raccoon further still. Despite Lukan's repetitive message to Klaus about focusing on them and them alone as well as their future, Klaus seemed just as stubborn as ever and refused to let go of Platt and Will. Lukan also realized that the otter's birthday was looming on the horizon, just two weeks away.

They skipped out on Christmas, but Lukan would be damned if he let this day pass him by.

It was another bitterly cold day. The temperatures were very easily below zero once again, but unlike other days, the wind had accompanied it to make it that much more miserable than it already was. This was the weather that Lukan detested. This was the weather that made Lukan question his decision to even remain in Lilac Grove. Klaus wanted to leave. So did his own mother. Why were they still there? Money and lack thereof? Tax season was very near... Perhaps with that in mind, they could make a great escape in a couple month's time! Lukan had to bring this up to both the otter and his mother to see what they thought. That is... if he could even survive a walk to work to even see the otter! He used to walk in such conditions to and from the school bus stop at the middle school, several hundred yards to the south of his home and could never get used to that. So quadruple that distance to work, and... Hell. Except with a drastic temperature contrast. Perhaps it was time to break down and get a heavy winter coat? Lukan hated that idea.. He hated how bulky they were, how hard it made for his arms to move. Yeah they served their purpose well enough, but once one was in a warm spot, the coat would immediately begin to cook the wearer! And putting it on and taking it off was tedious as hell... And storing it. Fuck that. Lukan realized he was probably being petty and nitpicky and these disadvantages, yet he refused to accept the mission to deal with them.

Lukan stepped outside, wearing only his hoodie for extra warmth as he always did. And whoa. The second he did, he felt the arctic wind blast his body instantaneously. He knew he wouldn't last more than a few moments out in this nonsense before becoming a coon-cicle again. He thought to himself, if it was any consolation at all, the wind would be blowing across him, instead of in his face like every morning he had to go to school. Although he wasn't sure what kind of consolation that was because he was still doomed to freeze his tail off regardless.

Lukan had reached the neighborhood where the otter family lived. By that point, the entire lower half of his body was covered in the frozen white. He debated saying hi to them. Then realized how stupid that debate was because he would become late for work. Klaus was off that day, so it did not matter at all! Stupid coon... He walked past them, only looking back one time with a solemn look on his face. Lukan was starting to miss the days that he shared with Klaus before they met those three creatures. Not only were they spent in Lukan's favorite season, but back in those days, he and the otter were carefree. They were able to focus only on each other. But as the time went by, life had shifted their focuses elsewhere, and even Lukan found it hard to focus on him and the otter anymore, despite that being his advice for him. Was his advice wrong? Would only focusing on each other only bring more troubles in life, because

they ignored what may be triggering these problems? Was there a balance needed between their focus, and if so... How could they find it without derailing everything?

Lukan shook his head violently as he continued his trek to the store. It was his day off, and the otter was at work this day. Lukan often found himself wondering why he was still going to the store despite this? And with the shitty weather to boot? Why not, he always asked himself. There was nothing better to do, sure, but it's not like he could easily visit the otter at work. Not only was he constantly busy, but the weather was still being a thorn in Lukan's side, especially now that they were in the dead of it. And yet, despite finding answers to that question Lukan still pressed on.

Ahh winter. Lilac Grove had already been hit with two major and crippling blizzards in the month that followed Lukan's birthday, each seemingly worse than the last. It shut down roads, destroyed trees and power lines, and pissed Lukan off whenever he had to still trek through the mess to get to work. Any consolation at all would be the fact that there were so few customers those days, that at least, for the most part, Lukan had gotten some peace and quiet. Lord knows he had been needing that these past few weeks what with Klaus' latest behavior regarding Platt and Will. Lukan was beginning to lose a lot of hope when it came to where Klaus' focuses lie. Every time it seemed, the otter would just lose it right in front of Lukan and other passerby whenever he saw the two of them together. Klaus had been throwing accusations at the pair of them that they were flaunting themselves in public on purpose just to psych him out. If that were true though, why was Klaus letting them do that to him!? Lukan just wished there was a way to get through to the thick headed creature. This was not healthy for anybody! The last time Klaus had did this, he actually did try and act upon his wishes to cleanse his eyes out...! Lukan was left incredulously aghast at this. And Klaus was still apparently angry at Lukan for not showing him as much attention as well. Well whenever Klaus had his little outbursts like this, Lukan definitely wanted to do so less and less!

So why the hell was Lukan still compelled to visit the otter at work!? Is it despite the way Klaus was acting now, Lukan was still faithful to him? That Lukan still felt an attraction to him of some kind? Lukan had to admit, he was starting to fall out of love with the otter the more out of character he became when he explodes at the sight of his ex and the snep together. This was not the otter he fell in love with. Not remotely. What happened to the happy go lucky and optimistic otter? What happened to his smile? His eagerness to be with Lukan? What happened to all of that? That was the otter he fell in love with. Where did he go!?

Lukan wanted to turn back and just go home. For an odd reason, he felt a sense of foreboding at the idea of visiting the otter. Not a premonition bad enough that would imply they would break up, but, something else only a trifle amount better. Lukan always hated getting those kinds of feelings.

Before Lukan knew it, he had reached his destination. He sighed to himself. If he were to turn back now, all of that journeying through the weather would have been for nothing. Lukan gritted his teeth and went inside.

The store was not very busy that day. He could tell since a few employees welcomed him upon entry. This never happened when the store was busy. Well, a weekday afternoon was going to be relatively slow, especially if the weather was far from fantastic by any standards. Although the denizens of Lilac Grove were more than okay to deal with it. Or they just did not care. Probably the latter.

Lukan wondered where the otter would be by this point. It always depended on how bad unloading the truck would be. Klaus had said that it could take as little as an hour, to as much as five hours, depending on the day. Great, so with that thought in his mind, Lukan believed that he may be looking for the otter for a few more hours yet. Brilliant. Well, one thing was for sure. Lukan was going to stay the hell away from the produce area because of a certain infamous vixen who worked there. He took his wandering paws to the other side of the store where the mostly abandoned lawn and garden center was. It was wiped. There was hardly anything in there. Some leftover autumn tools such as rakes and leaf blowers that were marked down were scattered here and there, but not much otherwise. There was no one manning the cash register near the garden entrance either. Just like the landscape, this part of the store was dead in the winter.

Lukan exited the store via that garden entrance. He almost jumped back inside when he looked to the left at the corner of the building. Right there at the bus stop was Platt Rivers. He was alone though. The spotted cat wasn't anywhere nearby. Lukan was curious. This was the first time in forever that he had seen him alone. Platt looked over. His expression was thoroughly unreadable, but Lukan could tell the wolf's cool blue eyes were reading his expression.

"Raccoon." was what he said, very simply to address Lukan as he strode in his direction.

Lukan could feel his heart beating in his chest when Platt addressed him. "The name's Lukan, wolf," he replied coolly.

"Touche," Platt replied simply. Then there was a silence. An awkward one. One that Lukan was almost certain the wolf instigated just to try and psych Lukan out. It was only somewhat successful.

"So how's you and Will going then?" Lukan decided to break the silence, and why on EARTH he went with that question to do so, he'll never understand.

"Is this your business?" Platt raised an eyebrow. Oh great. The silver wolf was now making Lukan feel like Eira. That was not okay.

Lukan could only think of one thing to potentially defend himself. "It is if you and Will keep... well... in front of me and Klaus." Lukan could not bring himself to say it.

Platt rolled his eyes. "If you think we've been doing all that on purpose just to get on Klaus' nerves, then you can't be more wrong. We just don't give a shit who sees it. The world will just have to get over itself and learn to deal with reality."

There's that word again. Reality... A term that Will in particular kept bringing up. Lukan wasn't sure how to respond because of his own paranoia directed at the world. There were often times where he wished he had the bold and brash attitude that other creatures like Platt had. But Lukan knew he lacked the confidence and strength required to do so. Platt went on though before Lukan could speak.

"And Klaus needs to accept reality just as much as they do. That reality partially being, the fact that I'm with someone else now. If he can't accept it, then it's only going to be worse for him."

"I do agree with that, really," Lukan started, not sure where to go with that statement. "I keep telling him that if he keeps losing it whenever he sees you two, it's not going to end well for him, or me, or anyone around for that matter. I just wish he would move on. With me," Lukan said sulkily.

Platt nodded. He seemed to do so in understanding. "You are starting to see one of the reasons why I broke up with him. It's because he doesn't like to let things go so easily. Once his mind is set on something, he never let's go of it. And well... In some cases, it's absolutely destructive. I didn't want to be a part of that."

Lukan dipped his head. "And he doesn't seem to understand that that was why. He thinks you wanted to hurt him. And he still does. Especially when you make out with Will in front of you like that."

Platt sighed. "It's not my intention to hurt anyone. In fact, it's because of that intention that led me to calling it off before one of us got hurt even more. Like I said that day in the park-- It's bad to prolong things that should have ended sooner."

Lukan looked at Platt sadly. "So you think my relationship with him is doomed?"

Platt genuinely looked sad and sympathetic. He placed a paw on Lukan's shoulder and took a deep breath. "Unfortunately. I do believe that. If Klaus can't change the reasons why his relationships fail, then all of the ones he'll have in the future will just be history repeating itself in an endless cycle. I'm sorry that you are more than likely going to just be another lap in that cycle, Lukan."

Lukan was almost devastated to hear this. Even though that he and Klaus were still together, to hear such absolute minimal faith from Klaus' ex was soul crushing. The raccoon wanted nothing more than for that to be untrue. For it to be anything other than the fate that awaits him and Klaus. What determination Lukan had now... was to prevent such a terrible destiny! "I-" he choked.

"I can see in your eyes, Lukan. You don't want this to happen, and believe me, I never did either. I wanted Klaus and I to work. But the second he started going off about this and that in his past... I just couldn't," Platt sighed again. The loud sound of a

diesel engine drowned out the last of what Platt said. Lukan looked past him, down the sloping hill that led away from the store. The bus that Platt had been waiting for was pulling in. "Like I said back then, Lukan. I do hope you and Klaus will work out. But I wouldn't hold those hopes too high unless he miraculously changes his perspectives on life. Will has done this. And that's why I'm with him! Once again, I wish you luck." And with all that said, Platt boarded the bus, and disappeared inside.

With the conversation with Platt at an end, Lukan found himself wandering around inside the store again, searching for Klaus. Platt had killed an at least acceptable amount of time for Klaus to possibly be on the floor at the moment. Mondays were almost always slow after all. He had to be around somewhere.

Lukan was tempted to ask around. One of the employees that he and Klaus worked with would possibly know. But he did not want to engage in a potentially awkward conversation with one of them where they would inevitably question the raccoon's sanity in coming in on his day off. He would rather look suspicious, circling the entire store dozens of times for the next hour. Because there really was nothing better for the raccoon to do! Lukan did not realize how much he needed someone like Klaus in his life until... Until the otter was no longer around all the time.

It was bound to happen eventually; Lukan knew it would, but damn it! Lukan hated it all the same... "What the hell are you doing here on your day off, ringtail!? Come to give me a little visit?" Eira. Farus. Tharo. Lukan was far from in the mood to deal with her now. Farther from it than the sun was to the edge of the galaxy.

"Eira, please. Please just not now, okay?" Lukan begged with a monotone to emphasize his seriousness. "I'm here for Klaus anyway."

"That otter? Can't say I've seen him. I dunno if the truck is done being unloaded yet, but how would I? I'm not a part of that whole process at all." Ah finally. Something useful and sensible coming from her maw. Lukan almost couldn't believe that late Christmas miracle!

"Alright, I'll keep an eye out for him. I need to talk to him about something really important," Lukan realized a planck time too late that he said the wrong thing to the wrong creature.

"Ooh? What about?" Eira pressed, just as Lukan knew she would do.

"Nothing. Just something he needs to know," Lukan replied.

Eira narrowed her gaze. "Well, I do hope to find out what, but I don't think I will," she shrugged. And Lukan was not sure how to feel about that statement. Eira was no longer even hiding her nosiness, but.. But did she just concede defeat!? There's no fucking way! Physics may as well dissolve and disintegrate around them!

Lukan did not even say his farewell to the vixen; he was that shocked! But to resume his circuits around the store was something he desired not to do. Part of him

just wanted to go back home, or even, back to his family's home and wait for him there. It was at this moment that Lukan realized just how stalkerish he was coming off as. But this was something Klaus needed to know! Klaus needed to know how Lukan felt! Maybe once Klaus realized what he was risking by behaving the way he was, and how Platt saw it, it would finally snap him where he needed to be! Or so Lukan hoped...

He shook his head. No. He already spent a long time in this store. May as well just keep up the waiting until he saw the otter. It was only a matter of time. He could not imagine how suspicious he looked, though... A raccoon circling the store dozens of times has got to look poorly.

Klaus was stocking in one of the aisles in grocery when Lukan finally found him minutes, or was it hours, later. Lukan suddenly had cold feet and was wondering if this was a good idea. Klaus indeed needed to know, but he worried for the otter's potential negative reaction. No. This was something that needed to be done.

"Klaus!" he called as he started taking hard strides down the aisle. The otter turned and faced him, looking only slightly surprised. The piercing on his tail clinked slightly at his movements.

"Lukan? Why are you here?" he asked in curiosity. He did not seem either glad, nor upset to see Lukan here.

"I need to talk to you about something. Something important." And this is where the otter's face immediately fell. Lukan flinched.

"You... Are you...?" Klaus' voice started shaking immensely. Wait. Lukan knew what Klaus was thinking, and was immediately abhorred by it.

"N-no! No absolutely not! I-I would never dream of that, but..."

"But...?" Klaus was wary. And seemed ready to defend himself if ever possible. Lukan was no liking where this may go.

"But the way you keep acting whenever we see Platt and Will. Why? Why do you always... blow up?" Lukan couldn't find a better way to put the end of his question.

"Why do you care so much about what they do?"

Klaus stared at Lukan for several seconds. He did not seem to want to respond to Lukan at all. He looked down, away from Lukan, looking sad, and completely defeated.

Lukan's voice softened. "Is there something bothering you Klaus? Something you never told me about or... I just want to know, because it's hurting us. You know that. Right?"

Klaus sighed. "I do, but... but I dunno how to explain it. It just. Really does bother me. And I dunno really why."

Lukan couldn't help but feel at least remotely skeptical. "There has to be a reason. I don't think there is no reason."

"Well whatever it is, I don't know what it is." Lukan had an itch in his tail that was telling him that Klaus was lying. Klaus did know exactly why. Klaus did know exactly what reason, but did not want to reveal to Lukan what it was. And that left Lukan guessing all the worst ideas in his head, ranging from Klaus still having feelings for Platt to not loving Lukan anymore at all. But did Lukan want to try and expose the otter for his more than likely fibs? How badly did Lukan want to know how Klaus truly felt? Lukan truly did feel almost terrified by what Klaus actually felt, for he feared it may mean the death of the relationship itself. But he also knew that if the secrecy and shadows were allowed to continue existing, the results would be one and the same. There was no easy way out, and Lukan hated it. He hated it so much. All he wanted in life. All he asked for. All he wanted was someone like Klaus in his life. And he only had him for a measly two and a half months! No. No this cannot be allowed to happen. Lukan knew their odds were stacked against them, but Lukan wanted that otter he fell in love with to come back. And he was willing to do nearly anything to make sure that happens. And with that in mind, he knew exactly what he needed to say.

"Klaus. Please. Please just tell me the truth. The otter I fell in love with is not here anymore, and I just want him back. And... and if he would, I need you to stop hiding everything from me. Okay?" Lukan pleaded.

"Y-you don't believe me?" Klaus looked even more defeated than ever.

"Well, it feels like you keep avoiding my questions, and just..." Lukan did not know how to phrase his concerns. Now was not the time to lose vocal cohesion!

"Just what?!" Klaus seemed to be getting defensive, as Lukan feared he might.

"Just don't seem willing to try and let go of Platt and move on with me," Lukan tried to explain. "I just want to know why that is! What's making you this way Klaus? All I want is for us to be happy, and whatever you're thinking, isn't making you happy."

Klaus was tearing up. "It's... It's complicated, Lukan. I-I'm not sure I fully understand it, but... You really want to know?"

Lukan walked up and took the otter's paws in his own. "Anything that will help me help you."

Klaus took a deep sigh. "Okay. I'll admit it all. But please, at least wait until I'm on lunch. Then I'll tell you..." Klaus seemed completely and utterly defeated.

Lukan nodded. "Thank you, Klaus."