

Fourteen. Blizzard of the Heart

With what had just happened fresh in Lukan's mind, there was a guarantee that the raccoon would fail to even remotely sleep soundly that night, especially given that he was still at the otter's house, sleeping over as if nothing had actually just happened. But he knew better. He knew better than to think that nothing had happened, for something did happen. As much as he did think of what happened, he wanted to ignore it. He wanted to pretend that it didn't. He wanted to think that it was just some sick joke that was being pulled on him. He did not want to believe it. He wanted to wake up from this nightmare. But no matter how often he tried to wake up, he never did, because he knew that he couldn't. How could he do so, if he was already awake? Now, Lukan just wished he never did wake up that morning if he knew that this was the fate that had awaited him.

There was another daunting realization that dawned on Lukan's mind. The holiday of love, Valentine's Day was on the immediate horizon, and now he had no one to spend it with. Lukan wanted to at least convince Klaus to postpone the break up until after the holiday was over, but Lukan began to think. What good would that do? It was like trying to keep a zombie alive and delaying the inevitable.

What Lukan loved was gone. It was all gone and he wasn't sure if he'd ever get it back. Despite what Klaus had said, it didn't feel genuine anymore. Klaus was lying to him this entire time, and he expected Lukan to believe what he said would be true! And then he goes and breaks the raccoon's heart! This... This is unforgivable! Lukan felt an immense wave of anger sweep over him. That otter... Look at him sleeping so peacefully as if nothing was wrong in the world at all. How could someone be so naive? Or was it heartless!? If he even cared at all, why wasn't he wide awake like Lukan was!?

Lukan thought again about trying to ask Klaus to postpone the break up until after the midway point of February. Despite everything that the otter had pulled, the raccoon still cared about him. He still wanted his company, companionship. He was willing to do anything to have it back. H-how could life be so cruel? Gifting him with something so wondrous. So beautiful! And then just yank it away from him like some cruel, downright evil monster?! No. What Klaus had done wasn't unforgivable. This was what was unforgivable. What to do to get this back? Restore what was snatched away? Be happy again. Hopeful. Loved. Klaus had said that he still loved the raccoon. How true was that? It can't be that true if Lukan did not feel anything from him of that sort any longer!

Lukan felt tears falling down his masked face and onto the floor next to his paws. So this was it then? What it's like to be heartbroken? ...There was no worse

feeling in the world. None can compare. None come even close. Not the illness instigated in Bright. Not the worst bully ever. Nothing. Lukan felt himself sobbing silently. Lukan had never felt this despaired in his life; there were no comparisons.

And now Lukan realized for a moment another reason why his coon shell had ever existed at all in the first place. That shell was supposed to protect him from harm, to keep him safe and happy while he remained alone like he had wanted. And then Klaus Richtors came along, destroyed his shell and then... Laid a devastating blow upon Lukan's soul. No. This simply not happening...!

Lukan stirred awake, eyes still damp. The fur on his face felt as if it were glued together. The raccoon was unable to breathe through his nose. He had no idea when he finally was able to cry himself to sleep, but it felt like he had not slept at all. Exhaustion ransacked his already aching head. The ring tailed creature simply did not even want to get up. Lukan only tilted his head slightly to look at the otter and his bedroom window. The otter was not in bed. Outside, there was snow falling, much heavier than it was the previous night. Lukan could not even be bothered by the inclement and abhorrent weather occurring in the outside world. The only things that was on his mind were the happenings of the previous night between him and his... ex. Those thoughts were all that mattered to him now. They were the only things he felt belonged in his head. Nothing else mattered. Not the weather. Not his future. Not what he was going to do now. Nothing else. Where did the otter go? Not just physically, but spiritually. Lukan could no longer feel his presence, his warmth, or beating heart. They were all gone, and left behind was a husk in the shape of a raccoon's body. What had been missing in Lukan's life, the thing he was previously oblivious too... It was gone, and now that Lukan knew what failed to fill the void in his heart, the pain began to set in.

Lukan did not want to get up. He did not want to will himself to go to work that day. He did not want to will himself to go on even another moment without the otter.

And with all these feelings coalescing together and attacking the raccoon's very soul simultaneously does Lukan realized the exact the term of what he was suffering through: heartbreak.

Was this how the otter felt when he was abandoned by Platt those months ago? If so, then Lukan truly felt he understood the levels of pain the otter must have endured, and why he holds so much animosity for the silver wolf to this day. Lukan would find it hard to forgive anyone who would inflict such unbearable pain on him. But in an instance such as this, Lukan knew that Klaus wasn't trying to hurt Lukan so badly. But did the otter truly believe that his mental state was bad enough to where he could conceivably hurt Lukan even more so in the future had they stayed together? No! There's no way! It's not possible! If only there was a way that Lukan could make him

see that... But the otter was so dead set and convinced of his own failures that Lukan questioned the legitimacy of, that he outright refused to listen to anything or anyone.

Was this... another reason that Platt had broken up with Klaus in the first place? The wolf never mentioned this, but Lukan felt he wouldn't be surprised if this was the case. What else about Klaus did Platt not tell him? The wolf had known Klaus for half a decade after all. Lukan also wondered how Platt would react if he learned that he and Klaus were no more. Judging by the wolf's previous demeanors, he would more than likely act unsurprised, Lukan just knew it. But... maybe the wolf would have advice for him. Lukan had no idea how to deal with a breakup and a shattered heart. He had never suffered such an emotional casualty before. Then he wondered for a moment just how willing would that wolf be to help Lukan? They weren't exactly friends after all. Though at the same time, were they enemies? Lukan felt so, but only because of his association with the hostile otter.

Oh... And what was his mom going to think since they were broken up? She would be all over him like Eira would, but at least instead of it being out of sheer annoyance, it would be to try and comfort him. Lukan felt he could really go for some comfort right about then. But... Lukan did not want it from his mom. He wanted it from an otter. A specific otter. One he knew and loved. One that was no longer with him anymore.

Lukan jumped when the door to the otter's room opened. He saw him. The otter's face. There was nothing but pain written all over it. All his facial features reflected all that Lukan felt, like a living and breathing mirror. The otter must have come in to see if and/or why Lukan was still in his room. Lukan had lost track of time and had no idea how late it was. The otter looked at him sadly, seeming to have lost all his will to speak. The otter turned tail, and walked away, piercing clinking on the door.

Lukan looked down at the necklace that Klaus had given him. What of this now, since he was no longer a part of the otter's family, technically speaking? Well, if this symbol was as Klaus had said, a facade just as much as he was, what true value does it still hold? Lukan had to question that, as well as whether he should even continue wearing it. Lukan shook his head as he held the trinket tightly. Despite him knowing that it would be for the best that he discard the now malign memory infused object, he still held the will to keep it. But... But why was that?

For the first time in an uncountable amount of time, Lukan forced himself to get to his paws. As much as he wished not to, he knew he would have to move eventually. His legs felt immensely heavy, like his paws were encased in cement. Was it the lack of movement over all that time, a lack of will in his muscles, or both? Lukan did not know, nor did he really care all that much.

As he slowly strode to the kitchen of the otter family's house he had to wonder just how welcome he was there now that he and Klaus were through. His parents never

did know that they were dating, and as far as they were concerned, him and Klaus were still friends. Although, despite knowing this, Lukan still felt thoroughly unwelcome.

Kristina took notice immediately. "Oh Lukan! There you are! I had almost forgotten that you had stayed the night! What's happened?" she obviously would want to know. It wasn't exactly possible to hide the fact that something drastic had happened to both him and Klaus. What with how withdrawn Klaus was, how Lukan took forever to even get up, and to how Lukan himself must have looked like. "It's already 1:30 in the afternoon!" Oh shit was it really? Lukan was due for work in a half hour. Lukan glanced at the clock in the kitchen and sure enough, that's what it displayed. Lukan was still debating in calling in. But he knew that if took too many more attendance points, his job would be lost. And that could not be allowed to happen. He could already see what would happen then... "Lukan? Are you okay?" Kristina was trying to get his attention again.

Lukan did not make eye contact at all. In fact he turned his head, facing away from all of them. "As fine as I am ever going to be today," was his blunt, pessimistic response. His voice was cracked from not using his voice at all for the longest time. Not that Lukan even wanted to talk anyways. He just wanted his otter back.

"Lukan, dear... If something's wrong, you could always talk to me," Kristina replied sympathetically. "I tell this to Klaus too, but he never says anything to me at all." And Lukan could somewhat understand why. Try as they might, but parents could not solve every problem their children may have. Lukan wondered what would be the point in confiding in someone else's mother in the first place. Plus, he knew if he did, he would have to tell her all about their relationship.

Lukan shook his head, looking down. "I would rather not talk about it, I'm afraid."

Kristina shrugged, looking at her husband. "Some creatures wonder why they think no one cares or would not help them, when they don't accept the offers they're given. I just don't get it."

"I'm sure there's more to it than that, honey," Kuaren replied evenly.

Kristina scowled and shook her head. "I'm not sure what that may be."

"Could be a number of things, really. Depends on the creature and their circumstances," Kuaren replied. "Klaus has only ever told us about... W-well..." And with that implication that Lukan knew the meaning of mentioned, Klaus dipped his head sadly.

Lukan sighed. "I have to go to work..." he said, feeling, and failing completely hiding the fact, defeated.

"Let us drive you there. I don't want anyone walking in that crappy weather," Kristina huffed angrily, looking out the window. The snow was still falling in a steady pace, definitely slowly piling up and wreaking annoyance all throughout Lilac Grove.

Lukan let out a small sigh. "Alright. But only because I really don't want to walk or... do anything really, today."

Kristina casted a fretful glance upon her husband, who only shrugged. Lukan felt bad for her. All she wanted to do was help because of how much she hated to see her son, or anyone for that matter, so badly depressed, but because both him and Klaus knew that there was nothing she could do, they refrained from letting her try. Was this something Lukan was okay with doing? Maybe he should confide in his own mother... "D-do you go to work too today, Klaus?"

Klaus shook his head. "Off today," he muttered almost inaudibly. His mother only responded with a nod.

"Hey, why is brother acting so weird?" Kandice piped up. Lukan almost did not even notice her presence until she spoke.

Kristina sighed. "I wish I knew..."

Lukan was completely drained of all energy and willpower upon his arrival at the store he worked for. His limbs felt more like tree trunks, only much smaller and much heavier. His mind was exhausted, but forced itself to stay busy with its innumerable negative thoughts buzzing through every overclocked neuron. There was no way Lukan wanted to be here. Yet, he knew he had to, for his future, despite how bleak it had seemed.

Once he was in the backroom, he saw Eira clocking in. He knew she would seek him out, notice his funk, and comment forthwith. He was not looking forward to that one bit.

"Ah Lukan, there you are! I need to speak with you when you get clocked in, alright?" Uh oh. That was one of the managers. A buck with unusually long fur. Lukan never saw him too often, but when he did, he was usually with the truck unloaders. Klaus only mentioned him a scarce amount of times. What could he want?

Lukan went to clock in as he was instructed to. He knew the manager, whose name was Domin, was watching him. Once Lukan was on the clock, he summoned Lukan to follow him inside the manager's office.

"You're not in trouble, I promise you. As you know, at the end of the fiscal year, we all get a small raise, those of us that have worked here for at least three months... I just need you to sign the paperwork involved to make it happen."

Oh yeah, Lukan forgot. It was that time of year. Tax season too was nearing. Lukan wondered how much he may get back from that. "Okay, that sound good," he replied, hoping that this prospect would get his mind off the otter.

"And there is one more thing. We have noticed that your performance has dipped recently. We want to make sure that everything is going alright for you so we can help you do better and better at your job," Domin went on.

Crap. So they have noticed the qualms Lukan has been having. What should Lukan say? "W-well I was having relationship troubles a-and uh... We. Broke up last night." Wait. Did he just admit this to his boss of all people? Why?!

"Oh, I am sorry to hear that. You could take the day off if you think you need to. I'll even excuse your absence." Lukan liked that offer, but a part of him just wanted to work. Only because he knew that if he went home, his mind would be free enough from distractions so that all he would be able to think about would be that otter.

"No thanks, sir. I-I'll be alright," he replied unconvincingly.

"Are you sure?" Domin said, unconvinced.

"Yes, sir."

"Alright, then get to work then."

"Hey ringtail!" And with that voice emanating from the nearby produce section of the store, Lukan let out a more than audible groan. Today was definitely not a good day to be alive. Eira Tharo made her presence known with a swish of her tail as she strode up to Lukan. "You don't look so good... Are you okay?"

What? No outright demand to know what happened? No outright pushiness? None of the usual Eira Lukan was used to for the past few years? Damn it Christmas miracles, why are they always so late?! Lukan couldn't believe there was a silver lining. "Un no," Lukan shook his head as much as his voice was. "I'm not really."

Eira looked sympathetic. "Would you like to talk about it?"

Lukan felt his eyes go wide, giving the illusion that his mask had shrunk. "Wh-who are you and what have you done to the real Eira Farus Tharo?"

Eira shook her head. "I'm sorry. That yellow fox guy had shown me what I was actually doing and... I see why you kept getting so mad at me. I've just always had this... insatiable curiosity for everything."

Lukan felt himself feeling at least somewhat better in admiration for the vixen. He made a mental note to thank Aero next time he may see him. "Well, I had just broken up with my boy-- I mean girlfriend yesterday and..." Lukan almost gave away that he was gay. Despite the progress Eira had seemed to be making, he was worried that such news would immediately destroy all of it.

"Oh ouch that really sucks... I'm sorry Lukan. Are you okay?" she repeated herself, despite Lukan answering the question already. Lukan could tell she was just as bad as he was at comforting someone.

The raccoon sighed. "I can only hope I will be."

Eira gave him a little smile. "Give it time. I'll even leave you alone if that will help?" she offered. Lukan then felt bad. He did not like that he made Eira feel like she was his enemy, but at the same time, Lukan only wanted comfort from that otter and nobody else.

Lukan shook his head. "Thanks Eira, for the offer, but I think I would like to be left alone for now..." he tried to say in the nicest way possible. He hoped that she would understand, at long last. Eira only nodded before returning to the produce department. Lukan felt even worse. All these creatures were offering him help. All of them wanted to make sure he was okay, but he kept shooting them down. Was this normal for someone with a broken heart? All Lukan wanted... was to get back what was taken away from him...

The days continued to go by. And as they did so, Lukan kept seeing all the Valentine's Day merchandise just flying off the shelf left and right. Happy, smiling creatures grabbing Valentine's Day cards, candy, teddy bears, and gifts all off the shelves. Some conversing with friends about how much their loved ones were going to love what they got. Lukan felt a new feeling rise from the pits of his stomach as he saw this as February began progressing. It was similar to anger. It burned just like it. It stuck in his throat in such a similar way. But he wasn't angry, and it only brought him sadness. What? What was this feeling? Jealousy? There couldn't be any other feeling that it could be. This... these creatures. They could have been Lukan himself doing such things for his boyfriend. And Klaus in turn could have done so for him as well. But no... No all that potential happiness was stripped away from so unfairly. So... coldly.

Lukan shook his head, trying to clear it. Lukan could not believe he was letting such petty and negative feelings take over his mind. No. These feelings were not coming from his mind, but from his heart. Why couldn't he control it anymore!? What had happened to the control he had over how he felt and what he wanted?! Lukan knew he couldn't allow himself to feel this way any longer. The heartbreak of losing Klaus. The jealousy of all this happiness that surrounded him. Realizing how he had lost control of who he was. There was nothing Lukan wanted to do more than to just run away and find something, somehow to end all of that pain. Feeling it all even once for just a few days was more than he could bear! Wh-what was Klaus feeling? Did he feel the same way? What was he thinking? About how he had fucked up and only ended up hurting them both even more? Would he finally realize what Lukan and Platt were trying to tell him all this time? Lukan could only hope. He had only seen Klaus a few times since they broke up. He seemed just as sullen and withdrawn as Lukan was. Perhaps there was a chance that he did feel that way. It was... Lukan's final hope, he felt, for him and Klaus. Above all else, he desperately pleaded to whatever higher power that existed that that hope would never be squandered. He desired more than

ever to be in the otter's company, to at least try and confirm those hopes. But... the otter seemed so far away. Out of his reach entirely. Lukan remembered how the otter said they could stay friends, but ever since they broke up, they haven't spoken to each other even one time. Lukan couldn't believe how bad the loneliness he was feeling. He had never felt such an awful feeling in his life before, and yet... now... everything has changed. And despite that, in the end nothing has changed because of the fact that he was back to the way he was before he met the otter: all alone.

Lukan tried to intercept the otter at his lunch break, which happened to coincide perfectly with Lukan's last break of the day, but the otter completely dodged him by leaving the store and going into a nearby fast food restaurant. Lukan, frustrated, knew he wouldn't have enough time to catch up to him. It was... as if the otter was avoiding him. But why? Lukan suddenly felt abandoned. Completely alone. Unwanted by even someone as loving as the otter was. Lukan couldn't take these feelings anymore. He just couldn't. He refused to. He wanted to do whatever it took to end them once and for all. But... how? How could he possibly-- in a town like this one... Lukan finally understood the true extent of the otter's true hatred for Lilac Grove and what it offered. Or the lack thereof.

Lukan felt trapped. Like there was nowhere for him to go or nothing for him to do. He felt immensely hopeless. He felt like the otter did. Like if he couldn't leave Lilac Grove, there would be absolutely no hope for him. Unless... unless a miracle could happen right then and there. On the spot. But Lukan knew better. He knew what his chances were to succeed in that regard, and they were so low that the negative number was closer to minus infinity than it was to zero.

Lukan only knew of one thing. And that was that he needed to contact that otter as soon as he could and try and figure out what his true feelings were at this moment in time. Only then, could Lukan believe that he could finalize what he should do next, now that his life had suddenly taken a drastic downturn.

...He could only imagine what he and the otter would both feel if they ever saw Platt and Will together again. That otter's jealousy and unwillingness to let go. This strong jealousy. They were so tightly woven together that Lukan couldn't undo it.

And now... He finally understood just why that was.