

Fifteen. Rampant Emotion

Lukan raced from the store once he had reached the end of his shift. He knew the otter was still on his lunch break. He failed to see the creature return to the store in that time; he had to still be there! Lukan had to figure out where the otter's heart currently lived. What did that otter intend on doing now? And what did it mean for him, Lukan, and everyone else that could be involved, such as both of their families?

When Lukan had entered the shabby looking restaurant, he immediately saw the otter sitting alone at one of the table, chewing away at a meager looking burger. Lukan gulped, ounces of courage leaving him by the second. Why was he afraid to talk to the otter now? Why was it so hard now? What was going on? Lukan didn't understand why everything changed as suddenly as they did. Nothing made sense to the raccoon anymore. He shook his head as he forced his body to sit down in the seat opposite to the otter.

Klaus looked up, looking sad. "Oh. Hi Lukan," he said, keeping his voice as low as possible. "What are you doing here?"

Lukan took a deep breath. "I wanted to talk to you, Klaus," Lukan replied boldly.

"What about?" Lukan could tell that the otter was trying and failing to pretend to be disinterested. But at this point, Lukan knew better than to believe that facade. The otter was so good at pretending. But not anymore.

"Do you actually still love me?" Lukan bursted out.

"Always," Klaus replied simply. Despite the otter's outward appearance, Lukan could see tears sparkling on the surface of the deep emerald pools on his face.

"Th-then why...?" Lukan felt his voice crack, forcing him to stop.

"I already told you though, Lukan. I ended it before I would have a chance to continue hurting you. I ended it because I love you, Lukan. I didn't want to hurt you anymore. Until I become a lovable otter again, I just should not see anyone. And sadly, that includes you. It's for both our own good..." the otter replied sadly.

"Klaus... it hurts so much being without you... I wish you knew just how much," Lukan felt immense amounts of tears and sadness welling up inside him.

The otter's face did not change. "Oh believe me. I do... And it's that pain that has turned me into who you've seen."

"S-so you think it best to inflict it on me instead?" Lukan breathed.

"I would never dream of hurting you, Lukan! It's just... no matter what I would end up doing, I knew I would be hurting you somehow, someday. In the end, I had no choice at all. Someone will always be hurt... No matter what. But I know, that in the long run, if we stayed together with me in the state I was and still am in, it would be worse. Much worse. So I had to. Do you know how much it hurts me too? I need you,

Lukan, as much as you need me, but... You have to understand why I did what I did... It may seem bad now, but I promise, when I properly heal, I'll come back for you."

Lukan felt the tears in his eyes start spilling out. "H-how long could that take?"

Klaus sighed and did not answer right away. "Months. A couple years. My will is not very strong, I'm afraid."

Lukan barely was able to wheeze out his response. "I can't wait another day without you, Klaus!"

Klaus immediately looked horrified. He froze completely, eyes wide, and maw agape. He seemed to look right past Lukan. Lukan looked behind him, and... There was no one there. No one at all. And yet Klaus looked as though he had seen a ghost or Platt and Will, something to turn him completely aghast. But there was nothing. And Lukan couldn't bring himself to ask why the otter was making such a face. But then he spoke, sounding thoroughly shaken. "I... I got to go. G-goodbye, Lukan." And with that, the otter stood up, took his tray and dumped his still half eaten food into the trash.

"N-no! Klaus! D-don't go!" Lukan begged. Lukan begged him not to go, more in the sense that he didn't want him to leave his heart and soul, and not just physically like now. It felt like the more the otter distanced himself from Lukan, the more Lukan's heart felt torn to shreds.

But the otter did not return. He did not even look back. Lukan could detect an immense amount of pain. And he could only tell that it was his own. Lukan failed to get the answers he was looking for. And the fact the otter kept distancing himself only hurt Lukan more.

Lukan turned to leave the restaurant when he saw the otter out in the parking lot. He was shaking heavily. It looked like, to Lukan, that he was sobbing heavily. But... why? Did the otter pine for the raccoon just as much? Was the otter so convinced that this was the only way? Despite that otter spilling the beans and expressing how he truly felt about the world to the raccoon, Lukan felt he knew even less about the creature than when he started. Lukan wanted to go out there and comfort the otter. He wanted to help him. He wanted that otter back into his life. Lukan couldn't even believe that his past self almost kicked him out of it since, that was where he felt he belonged. But... despite the desire, Lukan knew what would happen. The otter would not listen to him. The otter seemed like he didn't even want Lukan to help him at all! Hence... why they broke up? Lukan was so lost. So confused. And worst of all, so alone.

"Welcome back home, Lukey! How was work today?" was Sarah's almost daily question whenever Lukan returned home from work. Lukan only replied with a deep, uncaring sigh. "That good, was it?" Sarah replied sarcastically, not understanding at all why Lukan responded the way he did. Sarah went on even further without waiting for Lukan to respond at all. "Ya know, I've noticed that Klaus hasn't been over lately..."

Welp, here was where Lukan had to make a choice. Was he to tell his mom about their breakup, or should he pretend that they were still together? He weighed the decisions carefully. Last thing he wanted was his mother blasting him with a barrage of sympathy. While his mother meant well, it never did any good. And it regrettably ended up coming off as annoying to him as a result of that. But keeping the breakup a secret...? Was that even possible? No. Lukan knew his mother was going to find out eventually. There was almost no point in hiding it other than waiting for the right time. But would the right time even come? No. Lukan was more than doubtful that it ever would. "No... No not really," he said, with a sigh. "Klaus and I broke up."

Sarah was in disbelief. "No, really?! I'm so sorry Lukan!" she sprung from her computer desk to give her son a hug. Lukan did not even try to fight it back and hugged back. "A-are you two still friends at least?"

Lukan sighed again. "I don't know... He said we would be, but he's been avoiding me a lot ever since."

"I think he just needs more time, honey... Why have you guys broken up? Or is that too personal?"

"T-too personal." Lukan did not want to go too far with this at all. He already felt he jumped the shark by merely confessing what had happened.

Sarah only nodded. "I see. Are you okay, though? Or going to be? I don't want my son in any sort of pain at all."

"I... I don't really know..." Lukan confessed sadly. "This is my first heartbreak after my first real relationship. D-does it actually get better with time?"

Sarah hugged him tighter. "Of course it does."

"I can only hope so..."

Lukan wandered back into his room as soon as the mother coon let him go. Once inside, he closed the door, and sat on his bed. The thoughts and happenings of today. The past few days. Of the past few months. He let them sink into his soul. And yet... he failed to understand anything. What happened to him? What happened to Klaus? To everything? Everything was so hopelessly different now! Whatever happened to Lukan's desire to be alone!? Whatever happened to his comfort in life?! Where did it all go!? And why!?

That's it. Lukan felt that there was only one thing for him to strive for. Reclaim what was taken away. Reclaim that comfort. That love. That happiness that he had in his grasp. But as Klaus had proven, the hopes for that ever happening in Lilac Grove were basically zero. Klaus, Will, Platt, and himself may as well be the only gay guys in the entire city. But... But where was Lukan to go? Where COULD he go? The only thing that Lukan could think of was getting into a long distance relationship and then moving to wherever on Earth he would be. Was that a good idea? It was the only one Lukan had.

So. In the end. Lukan's future plans were, by and large, undisturbed, the raccoon realized. The goal was still to leave Lilac Grove, but the only change is that it would be without the otter. Lukan did not know how long it would take to raise the money that was necessary to leave, but damn it. Now he was determined to. He needed that compassion. After such a past life devoid of as such had left Lukan desiring nothing more. Lukan still couldn't understand why he suddenly felt he needed it, or how he ever survived without it. Was this where the saying "Ignorance is bliss" comes into play? After all, cubs were always so happy because they were so ignorant, so oblivious to the world around them. They didn't know the harsh reality of the world until they were in their teens usually, and that's where depression usually starts.

As terrible as it sounded to Lukan, he started to thoroughly begin regretting helping Klaus get over his break up with Platt all the way back then. If... he ever got over it at all that is. If he had never done so, all of this pain could have been averted. And Lukan would still be happy with his life, and remain ignorant to the true nature of love. It's not worth it, if heartbreak can be this emotionally devastating to one's mind. Not even one time.

And yet. Despite this belief, Lukan could not go on without it. But why? If he believed what his mind thought was true, why was his heart refusing to even listen to a rational thing it was saying?! He shook his head violently as he climbed into bed. So with his mind and soul arguing with each other, Lukan no longer had any clear idea of what to do any longer. Leave Lilac Grove... That was the only certainty now. But where?

It was February 11th. Just three days remaining until Valentine's Day would rear its head. A head that Lukan perceived to be nothing more than ugly any longer. A holiday that he had once just simply shrugged off and ignored had turned into one that he believed deserved nothing more than his scorn and a fat middle finger straight up the ass! Lukan saw them. Saw them everywhere. Much more so than on the previous days that assisted in leading up to the future day to come. All these happy couples. Ones that Lukan thought he would be able to be among. But no. No of course not. Why would he?! It's not like he would be lucky enough in his life to be as such, now would he?!

Lukan thought about Klaus and wondered, how he felt about all this. Did the otter feel the same way? Did he feel worse, god forbid? With the way the otter had been acting as of late, the latter option was more than just a distinct possibility. What about Will and Platt, since they were all together as well? Lukan never thought about others like this in the past when he was still in high school. Just yet another thing to add to the list of things that have changed...

Lukan decided to take a small walk through the park where he and Klaus had met well over three months ago. The park felt dead. Desolate. Decayed. The trees were

bare. All the color was stripped from the grass, the trees, the earth. Snow was still piled up where the sun could not reach so easily. And even with the sun's light, the area seemed dim. Hopeless. A perfect reflection of Lukan's heart. This park had been such a perfect reflection though, starting out beautiful and colorful on the day Lukan met Klaus. To dying and losing its vitality when Klaus revealed his story. To this.

A familiar sound hit his ears. The sound of paw steps. Creatures were walking his way. Lukan remembered that sound so when it belonged to Platt and Klaus. He momentarily wondered who it may belong to this time.

"...What? What do you mean by that?!" That voice...! Lukan felt his heart thump when he realized who it belonged to. Platt Rivers!

"What I mean is, Platt, is that we don't seem to see eye to eye when it comes to how the mind works!" Will too! But what on Earth were they talking about? Lukan instinctively stayed hidden. He didn't feel right for eavesdropping, but... He knew if he left now, they would know he was there. No other choice..

"You're crazy if you think that that is something anyone with a sound mind could believe!" Platt exclaimed, his voice approaching Lukan's location.

"Ah, but what if no normal creature's mind is sound, and it takes some thinking to realize what I say may be a distinct possibility?" the snep was trying to sound all intellectual. All that Lukan could detect was nothing more than indiscriminate nonsense! Platt seemed to agree.

"Oh, so you're saying that I'm ill in the head now, are ya?" he was getting defensive. Losing his cool. Platt always seemed calm and collected except for when-- Was this creature someone who always lost his cool when he was in an argument like this with someone?

"No. I am saying every creature is. Too deluded by these emotions to think coherently. Overruled by illusions and fallacies," Will replied plainly. "If you took control of your mind, you could easily dispel what clouds the truth."

"And that would be?!" Platt demanded.

"Emotions," just as plain and simple as before.

"You sound like a villain from some RPG, now," Platt scoffed dismissively. "What kind of lunatic thinks that you could just get rid of emotions with a snap of the fingers?"

"Aren't I living proof? I have become enlightened when I stopped thinking about this and that. When I stopped worrying. When I stopped getting angry at everything. When I stopped letting happiness expose my weaknesses. And most importantly... when I stopped love from completely taking over my desires."

At that last one, Lukan felt a chill going down his spine. Why was that?

"You're batshit insane!" Platt exclaimed. "We all need emotions to express how we feel. It allows us to be alive. To have a soul!"

"A weak soul hindered by delusions and desires of unrealistic grandeur," Will was equally dismissive. "And that's why I don't think 'mental health' as you would call it should be taken the way it has been. Therapists and the like need to assist in dispelling these hindrances. Religion was built from emotion. And religion is seen as a hindrance to most creatures that strive to build our future! We need to tackle the root cause of our problems and eliminate them!" Will growled.

"What the fuck kind of drugs are you on!? You do realize that it was because of emotions that futurists want to strive for a better future? Because life sucks ass right now?!"

"And why does life suck now? Because imbecilic and entitled creatures and their constant competition for attention and success. Seeing who could outdo the other. Jealousy and envy and greed all mixing in to create nothing but chaos! And what happens to creatures that have no shot? Ones born with very little money? Or social capability?"

Lukan felt his heart skip a beat. Was he just referring to him and Klaus just then?!

"The inevitably lose and are crushed. All because of each others' emotions intertwining and poisoning each others' minds. It cannot be allowed to become this way."

Platt grunted. "So what the fuck were you wanting to be my boyfriend for then?! It's not out of love, because you are clearly incapable of feeling it! So why the fuck?!"

Will shook his head. "It's not that I am incapable of love. I just will myself not to feel it, just like with any other emotion. And I got close to you, because I wanted to teach you what happens when emotions are allowed to fester in your mind for too long!"

"I already know," Platt spat. "Klaus is a prime example of letting emotions go too far."

"And finally, we reach agreement on something. That poor otter... he has no idea that there is simply no hope for him anymore."

"There is always hope. That's an emotion that even you can't deny is necessary for everyone to have," Platt clenched his fists.

"One of the worst ones. The prime example of being filled with illusions and delusions of grandeur that one would never achieve," Will rebutted immediately. "Set themselves up for failure, and thus, cycle more negative emotions to fuel through the cycle of self destruction!"

"You know what?" Platt hissed. "I think you're just salty because nothing ever has gone your way in life, and you're blaming how creatures involved had made you feel, rather than taking responsibility for your faults and actions!"

"Nothing ever went my way, until I took control of my own mind that is."

Platt seemed to have enough. "Forget this. You're the one that's beyond hope. The complete fucking extreme opposite from Klaus. You're the one that's delusional." And without even listening to Will's reply, Platt began to walk off.

"Someday you'll see what I mean. I hope that day comes soon." Will called after him.

"You can consider us broken up, snep! Ciao!"

What... the fuck just Lukan witness? Before Lukan could even process what in the hell just happened, the snep spoke. "What say you about all this, raccoon?"

Lukan jumped in surprise so intensely, that he tumbled out of the bush he was hiding behind and landed on the park path flat on his tail. "I-I didn't mean to--!"

But the cat held up a paw for his silence. "Don't worry about it. You know what I said, after all."

"I-I..." Lukan had absolutely no idea what to even say to this cat. He didn't even fully comprehend what he was even talking about in the first place!

"So, if I may ask, how are you and Klaus going?" Will prompted.

"U-uh..." And now Lukan was out of words to say for a different reason now! To say what happened or--

"You two have broken up. I see," Will guessed perfectly. Or was it even a guess at all!? Who was this cat anyways!?

"H-how...?" Lukan began, awestruck at the cat's psychic powers.

"I can see it in your eyes. The emotions," Will replied, pointing to Lukan's sapphire colored eyes.

"You're gonna tell me that what I feel is wrong and bad, aren't you?" Lukan quickly assumed, bracing himself.

But Will shook his head. "You already heard me say it once; you don't need me to say it again. But will my breath be wasted on you, or will you actually heed what I have to say?"

Lukan wasn't sure how to answer that. Okay, he wasn't good at answering any questions that were thrown at him, but especially ones as vague and broad as this one was. Yet, somehow, how Lukan decided to respond, surprised even him. "Anything to get rid of how I feel right now..."

"Ah good, a creature with a sensible head on their shoulders. Finally." Will smiled softly in approval. "Listen. It's not easy shutting out feelings and becoming completely and 100% apathetic. So, the first thing you need to do, is clear your mind. Calm it. And stop thinking. Shut it down as much as you can will it to do."

Stop thinking?! But that was all Lukan ever did! Always kept thinking and worrying about everything... How was he going to do--?!

"William Perow?! What do you think you are doing?!" The sudden loud voice kept Lukan from thinking any further. Ohhh so that's how he was going to stop

thinking! Oh wait, that would only bring his thoughtful attention to whatever interrupted him. Well shit. He and the snow leopard turned their heads towards the familiar voice and saw the angry and aghast face of a golden furred fox. Aero Novara. He strut right up to the spotted feline, glaring intensely. "Are you poisoning the minds of these creatures yet again with you sick, twisted logic?" he snarled.

Will did not even flinch at the vulpine's harsh tone. "You got it all backwards, fox. I am helping him purify his mind. He IS the only one willing to listen to reason, after all."

Aero shook his head violently, growling. He turned his head to face Lukan, suddenly looking more desperate than angry. "Listen, Lukan. This cat is one nasty, manipulative piece of shit. He's trying to get into your head so he could take advantage of you."

Lukan felt immense amounts of confusion welling inside him. "Wh-whaa...?"

"Oh, and you accuse me of being the one poisoning the minds of other creatures. How classically ironic," Will said, with a light sneer permeating his usually blank and plain voice.

"How many times do I have to tell you before you finally get it, cat?! We creatures need our emotions to better connect with one another. To understand each other. To help each strive for greater heights! We can achieve whatever we want if we have the determination to do so. That's what we need. Not a robotic, soulless world where no one is allowed to feel anything. Don't you see how dystopian your idea sounds?" Aero seemed desperate still, as if he had been arguing with the snow leopard for far longer than Lukan would be able to guess.

Will waved his paw dismissively. "Help each other. Right... Tell me how many creatures your kind has manipulated, feigning benign intentions to help and aid, only to steal what wasn't theirs? Tell me how many creatures say they want to help, but never do? And tell me how many creatures go out of their way to hurt and harm others, out of greed, envy, and selfish desires? Desires that I seek out to squander?"

Aero narrowed his eyes, which were shining like a golden fire, even in broad daylight. "I think you know that answer better than anyone else, snep."

Lukan could only stand, looking between the two creatures that were arguing with each other. It looked like they had done this several times in the past. Neither one was willing to budge, stuck in an everlasting stalemate. Swords held against each other, not one overwhelming the other. The perfect definition of evenly matched. And Lukan stood right in the middle of the crossfire.

Aero went on as Will said nothing in response. "You must know that answer. Do NOT pretend that you don't!" the fox was growing increasingly furious. Much more so than Lukan could believe was possible in such a seemingly always level headed creature. There was something else about his voice. That desperation was still there.

But it wasn't the same type of desperation that Lukan detected before. It wasn't like Aero trying to sway the raccoon to his side anymore. It was more like... Aero was trying as hard as he could to get the snow leopard to understand. But not quite because he wanted the snow leopard to stop what he was doing... but something else. What though?

"I know what you are getting at fox. Why can't you just let it go?"

"I don't let things go until justice and understanding have been doled out to whom it belongs to," Aero replied proudly.

"You and your mindset revolving around justice. Can't you just be content with how the world will be? Those who harm others will always get away, and those victimized will turn out to be vilified. The world will never be fair. So let it go."

"You have your mindset. I have mine. At least mine has good intentions that don't have devastating consequences for society," Aero replied coolly. "In any case, that justice still needs to be served to you for what you've done."

Will shook his head again and sighed. Lukan looked at Aero. "What... what's happening?" he asked quietly.

Aero turned to look at Lukan. "Trying to get him to understand what he's done and what he's doing now. You want to know why I know him so well? It took me a while, but I finally understand just what mind games that snep wants to play with you, Platt, and Klaus. And ones he tried to play on me when we were together."

Lukan felt a shiver go down his spine and into his fingers, toes, and tail. "Wait. You mean you two were...?"

Aero dipped his head, confirming the answer with that alone.