

Eighteen. Distance

Lukan couldn't believe his luck. How? Why? What? Klaus was here? In some random coffee shop in downtown? Lukan could ask all the questions he wanted, but he wasn't even sure how many of them would be answered! All Lukan could exclaim was the otter's name, just like old times. "Klaus! Wh-what the-!?" he stopped right there.

The otter narrowed his eyes. "I got a job interview for this coffee shop. Despite my situation, I should try to get another job so it won't be SO bad for me. Hell, I thought I would possibly make enough to stay here in Lilac Grove if I got enough hours. But now I see you with another guy. I see how it is," his voice hardened, and eyes narrowed further to the point where they were glaring at Lukan.

"Klaus, what are you talking about?" Lukan looked at the otter, mask enlarged by widened eyes.

"I-I said that I would come back for you, but you just go and start with another guy?! Have you no faith in me at all!? Was this what you meant by you had somewhere to go today?!" Klaus' voice was rising in itch like boiling water in a kettle. Lukan was looking around warily. There were so many things he wanted to say to Klaus at once, but he had to choose one at a time.

"Klaus, please, not in public!" he hissed, trying to get the otter to calm down. But if past experiences taught Lukan anything, he knew that that was quite a bit more impossible than literally anything.

"I don't give a fuck who sees! I want you to know how I feel! All I tried to do was to help you, and this?! This?!" Klaus was practically squealing. He had reached that level of anger that demolished all vocal coherency.

Though Lukan was incredulous about why Klaus was exploding, Lukan was more wary of who was seeing Klaus' meltdown than anything else. "It's NOT what it looks like!" he exclaimed.

"That's what they all say!" Klaus snarled. "You may as well have cheated on me you fucking traitorous trash panda! You know what? I don't regret what I did to you anymore! I don't regret accidentally making you addicted to love! Not one bit!"

Lukan's face scrunched up in confusion. "The fuck are you talking about?"

It was at this point one of the baristas, a cougar, came up to them. "I must ask you to stop arguing or take it outside; you are disturbing our other guests," she said calmly.

Klaus stared at Lukan. Lukan stared at Klaus. One looked at the other with pure, unadulterated anger, and the other looked back with complete shock and confusion. Then Klaus sighed. "Alright. You know what? I think I get it. So whatever. I'll just go then."

As Klaus started to walk away, Lukan called after him. "Hey what about your interview?!"

"Forget about it!" Klaus called as he half slammed the door behind him and stormed off into the heart of downtown. Upon the otter's departure, the coffee shop fell into an awkward silence. Some of the creatures that were watching the drama breaking down tried to go back to what they were doing prior to it, but it was clear to Lukan that some couldn't.

"Hehehe, faggots," one of them said as if he enjoyed the show. Lukan was not even concerned with creatures like him at this moment in time. Lukan looked at Nate, who looked thoroughly aghast.

"W-was that your otter ex?" he stammered out, maw agape.

Lukan sighed. "Yeah, that was." That was all he could say.

"Oh jeez, I'm sorry," Nate replied, gritting his teeth. "Although he said something about cheating on him. Um... first of all, does that mean you two are still together? And second of all, did he think we were on a date or something?"

"Well it seemed like he did think we were on a date. B-but no. We are broken up. He said something about needing to heal or some shit before he was going to be in another relationship, and then he was going to come back to get me."

Nate scratched his head in puzzlement. "Doesn't he get that if he breaks up with someone, that someone is then free to date who they want?"

Lukan shook his head. "I really don't know what's really going on in that creature's head. Sad thing is, I understand him better than others I've met."

"Hm.." Nate gave no legitimate response.

"What's wrong, Nate?" Lukan was worried the whole ordeal had upset him.

Nate shook his head. "Sorry. It's nothing. I just feel sorry for you is all," what he said, how he said it, and how seemed to feel somehow didn't match. "I just wish there was more I could do to help you."

Lukan sighed. "I know I want to know what these creatures think and why they do what they do, but I know I never will. No one ever will. I've said this so many times already, but it's true! Creatures who can be trusted and ones who can't. Sometimes you just can't tell the difference until when you take a chance, and it's then too late!"

Something flashed in the cat's eyes. Lukan momentarily felt curious as to what it was, but it was gone in less than a planck time. "Well, you can trust me," he said. There was a hint of uncertainty in his voice. A slight hint. So slight that Lukan knew that if Nate had spoken to him as such a year ago, he wouldn't have been able to pick up on it. But, why was that? Nate shook his head. "Let's go do something else, to get our minds off of everything that just happened."

Lukan nodded. "That's probably a good idea," he said as he started to follow Nate out of the cafe, thinking in the back of his mind that no matter what they did,

Lukan was unsure if he could get the otter's unwarranted anger out. Lukan did not even realize that he left his unconsumed coffee sitting at the table they were at until they were several yards from the cafe.

Nate sighed as an awkward silence began. He undoubtedly was trying to prevent it from rising to power between them. "So, what else did you want to do?"

Lukan wanted to think of something. But all he could think about was Klaus and the way he assumed that he and Nate were on a date. When Lukan thought about it, he realized that it could be seen that way. Wasn't a coffee outing usually one type of date that couples go on all the time? Maybe? Lukan still hated how he knew so little about relationships. "M-maybe a movie?" he suggested. Damn it coon! That was a classic date activity!

Nate nodded. "Maybe get a bite to eat afterwards? Depending on how long the movie is anyways. What movie by the way?"

A bite to eat? Lukan was about ready to call it a date. Considering his feelings and Klaus' reaction, he was no longer sure of how to feel about that prospect. "I dunno. Anything good showing?"

Nate shrugged. "Let's go check and see the listings when we get to the theater."

Being in downtown meant that everything was relatively close to each other. They had passed the only book store left in town that Lukan was thinking about earlier not long after leaving the cafe. Lukan was wary that he was going to run into Klaus again somewhere else in downtown. If the cafe was bad enough to convince the otter the raccoon was on another date, what would he say if he caught them in the theater? Lukan just couldn't believe his luck, running into Klaus like that. But at the same time, he really could. His luck always ran exactly like that in his life. Why continue being incredulous to something that happens all the time? Probably because of the fact that it happens all the time.

Once at the theater that Lukan and his mother used to go to all the time when good movies were always being released, Nate scanned the window for all of the screenings. "Hrm..." He sounded disappointed. "There is nothing good. Just sequels, remakes, and whatever the fuck cheap animated movie it is this time."

Lukan shook his head. "Damn. Whatever happened to all the good stuff when I was a cub? It's all trash now."

"I know right? Should we just watch one just to see how hilariously bad it is? I bet we could get a good laugh out of one of these "horror" films," he put air quotes around the word "horror". Lukan wasn't sure. Lukan hated horror movies. But he had to admit, it could possibly be fun?

Lukan finally nodded. "Heh. I bet. I've actually been a little curious about just how awful that horror movie that's about social media is. I cannot believe they made a movie out of something like that!"

Nate just shook his head disappointedly. "Case in point that Hollywood is definitely running out of ideas. Let's see it, then, shall we?"

Lukan nodded. "Yes. Yes let's." Although Lukan wasn't entirely on board with watching any movie at that moment in time, he desperately wanted to get that otter's terrible outburst out of his mind.

Approximately two hours later, Lukan left the theater, wide eyed from horror. He wasn't horrified by the horror movie, but by horrible it was. So in a way, it was still a horror movie in that respect. Lukan had not expected it to be that bad. "What kind of creature stalks someone's messenger to get into their heads like THAT?!" he exclaimed to Nate, who followed him out, sipping on a cup of now probably beyond flat soda.

Nate shrugged. "Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if something like that actually does happen. I just find the acting absolutely atrocious."

Lukan shook his head. "That editing though! Nothing was consistent! You can obviously tell when those creatures changed positions between shots, I mean come on!"

Nate giggled lightly. "That too. And the editor's name was shown on display for all of to see in the credits. So is the director's. They're gonna be ridiculed for years for this thing!"

Lukan shook his head disbelievingly. "Or until the next dudes who have no idea what they're doing come along and release another disaster-piece."

"Ha. Perhaps. I swear movies really do get worse as the years go on. Same with music. And TV. Ya know, the entertainment industry as a whole is turning into shit," Nate pointed out.

Lukan shrugged. "The Internet," he said plainly.

"Probably. I feel like there might be more to it," Nate replied. "Hey Lukan?" he added as they left the theater. Lukan, as he always had, started feeling lightheaded from the headache he was always given upon watching a movie on the big screen once reintroduced to the fresh air.

"Yeah?" Lukan responded, trying not to sound too out of it. He had no idea how well that worked out.

"Probably. I feel like there might be more to it," Nate replied. "Hey Lukan?" he added as they left the theater. Lukan, as he always had, started feeling lightheaded from the headache he was always given upon watching a movie on the big screen once reintroduced to the fresh air.

"Yeah?" Lukan responded, trying not to sound too out of it. He had no idea how well that worked out.

"It's great hanging out with you. You know... despite that whole... you know." Nate started, sounding somewhat nervous. He was not looking directly at Lukan. Lukan tried to see what he was looking at, but traffic on the street in front blocked his view.

"Klaus? Yeah, I am so sorry about that. I had no idea he'd be there. And as you can see, that creature can get overly emotional when he loses control," Lukan replied.

"Don't worry about it. It's not your fault or anything," Nate said. "But I would really like to hang out again sometime. Maybe do something different or something, I don't know. What do you think?" Something told Lukan that the cat was beating around the bush about something. Lukan knew that because this was how he talked when he did the same thing.

"Like what?" Lukan asked. "A second date, you mean?" he added relatively teasingly. He said it in such a way that the otter used to do to him, for he had a feeling he knew what the cat was implying.

Nate didn't blush, but he was flustered nonetheless. "Second date? I-I guess what we did today could be considered a date, huh? Well then. How embarrassing." Nate seemed like he was pretending to not have realized this fact, but was failing so spectacularly that even Lukan was able to pick up on it. Lukan debated on trying to get the cat to confess what he was really thinking. He knew which one he decided would more than likely make a difference on their future. Well. Lukan knew what he wanted. And he knew what Nate wanted. What harm could there be?

"Come on, Nate. Even I can tell you want to be with me. Try harder to hide it," Lukan stuck out his tongue playfully, heart beating so heavily in his chest that it shook his entire body.

This time, Nate did blush. "H-how did you know that? I thought you said..." He shook his head violently as if he was saying something completely incorrect and he realized it too late. "N-never mind. B-but you're right. Wh-why? Is that a bad thing?" he asked, wide eyed.

Lukan laughed softly. This cat. Reminded Lukan so much of himself when he first got together with Klaus. Now he understood why Klaus thought he was so adorable, because Lukan found the cat just as much so. "Of course not. But after only one date? Because I think one thing I did wrong with Klaus was that we didn't properly get to know each other before getting together," Lukan noted, thinking about how they only got to know each other a little bit, and then Klaus kissed him and that was that. Of course, the otter was hiding a crucial aspect about himself as much as he could until it was too late, but...

"Second date then," Nate replied, shakily interrupting Lukan's thoughts. "When are you next free?"

"Ahh, Tuesday, I'm afraid because of work," Lukan added a tone of disgust at the last word. "Unless you think we can still do something at like, seven in the evening tomorrow or something."

Nate laughed. "We'll do dinner tomorrow instead. If that's alright with you of course."

Lukan nodded brightly. "Of course it is! Can probably go to that diner thing between where I work and where I live! Or that new Japanese steakhouse that they built just out of the way in the area."

"Ooh. Japanese sounds so good right now," Nate said, licking his lips. "Will probably be real expensive, but it's fine." Lukan had a feeling the cat was thinking of the sushi. Oh no. Had he just gotten with ANOTHER fish lover?!

"Japanese it is. I head the cooks cook the food right in front of you, doing these really cool tricks too. Dinner AND a show!" Lukan added, not caring enough about the fish to note it further.

Cat eyes turned into discs. "Oh really? That sounds awesome! Now I can't wait!"

Lukan laughed. "Cancel it from tomorrow then and just go now? There is still a lot of time left in the day, you know." He added, noting that it was still very light out, and may be so for a little while yet, despite the shorter days in the winter months.

"You make a good point," Nate responded. "Yeah. Let's go."

Lukan rode with Nate back to the side of town where Lukan lived. It felt weird riding in someone else's car. Lukan had gotten so used to the otter's truck, even though it had been quite some time since that vehicle was even operational. The sun was hovering just above the horizon when they had reached the restaurant. Lukan had thought it was earlier than it was. But being in downtown surrounded by buildings, trees, and other obstructions, it was hard to see the sun like he could around his little area of town. Lukan found himself thinking again. How was it, that in a town as empty as Lilac Grove had so many other creatures of his kind in the same general area of such a small town? It couldn't be possible... It was almost too good to be true, he thought.

"What's up, Lukan? You're staring off into space," Nate noted as he pulled into the parking lot of the secluded plaza that held the restaurant.

"I always do that," Lukan noted. "Just thinking about how there is like, at least six of us um... queers--" Lukan could not think of a better word-- "in Lilac Grove. It feels like that shouldn't make any sense."

Nate looked away when he parked, not placing the car in park or taking his keys from the ignition. "I suppose you're right. I really did think I was the only one!"

Lukan sighed. "Klaus did too. Sometimes I wonder if we're blind to the answers being right in front of our faces."

Nate didn't respond right away in favor of taking a second to presumably think of what Lukan had just said. "Maybe it is," he said before finally stopping his car's engine.

"What are you thinking about?" Lukan prompted curiously. It was like looking into a mirror. Lukan had never seen a creature acting so similarly to himself in his life! It was almost off putting.

Nate shook his head. "I'm just thinking. If the answer was right in front of me, what would it be? After all, there are so many things in front of me after all."

Lukan nodded. "That's true. I do wonder what answers are for me too. What was so obvious, that I still somehow missed it?" Lukan sighed as he then thought of something. "I need to talk to Klaus, if he'd even let me."

Nate somehow looked hurt. "You don't think he's..." he started, but did not finish. Lukan knew what he meant. How did he know what he meant?!

"After today, no. I don't really think so at all. I don't miss him anymore, but I do still need to get some answers from him," Lukan replied calmly. For the first time in a month, Lukan was able to say that he did not miss the otter. Was it because of...?

Nate almost seemed to take a sigh of relief. "Okay, I see. Is it about why he blew up at us earlier?"

Lukan shook his head. "It's about what he said to me when he blew up. Addicted to love? What the hell does he mean by that?"

Nate shook his head. "I-I have no idea." His voice seemed even shakier than before. "It does sound like that otter has issues."

"He... does," Lukan hated speaking badly about Klaus, but he had to acknowledge that the otter most certainly was not right in the head. Lukan opened the door to his side. "Well, I'll figure it out later, I hope. For now, I'm starved. Let's go eat."

Nate nodded and followed suit. "Oh yeah let's."

Nate's eyes became perfect circles again. "What the actual..?! Twenty-five dollars j-just for one of us?!" he breathed, gripping his receipt in utter horror.

"Hey, if it's high quality food prepared right in front of you, it's to be expected," Lukan shrugged.

Nate seemed thoroughly frustrated though. "Agggh, should have gone to that other place you mentioned. Someone's gonna owe me for all this." He added that last statement under his breath and Lukan barely heard it.

"What was that?"

Nate shook his head. "Nothing, just talking to myself."

Lukan smiled softly. "Oh and keep in mind you ordered something with seafood in it. It's going to be more expensive, you know."

The cat's whiskers twitched. "Right."

"I mean, mine's only nineteen dollars, so," Lukan shrugged.

Nate's face brightened up. "Well, when you think about how that cook flipped all that rice around with the fire and the way he sprayed the sauces around. Like jeebus!" Wide eyes return. Yet Lukan wasn't getting tired of them.

Lukan smirked. "I don't think I'll forget how he faked you out by pretending he was going to spray you with cooking oil. I swear I saw your head touch the ceiling!"

Nate flushed. "D-don't remind me," he pouted.

"I'd pay twenty dollars to see that again!" Lukan stuck out his tongue teasingly. He then sighed. "Nate, you know, hanging out with you has helped me forget that otter and how I felt about him. It's really nice!"

"Heh," Nate huffed. "Well, I most certainly don't mind if we keep dating like this. Who knows? C-could consider ourselves boyfriends?" Nate seemed hopeful when he asked the question. As much as Lukan wanted to say yes, there was a nagging feeling in the back of his mind that told him he should say no.

"Sure, I don't mind that." What? Why did his voice completely ignore that feeling!? Lukan felt his heart jump when it realized what Lukan had just said, but it was too late to rescind it. The cat's amber eyes sparkled happily.

"R-really? U-uh... Th-that's great! Thank you, h-hon!"

Lukan bit his lip apprehensively. What had he just done? He shook the thoughts from his mind. No! Surely things will be alright, right? It had to be! Lukan wanted to stop being so presumptuously pessimistic. "O-of course! After what happened with Klaus, this is what I think I need. Speaking of, I really need to go and find him."

Nate nodded. "I understand. Need a ride home?"

Lukan shook his head. "Nah, I live just around the corner down the hill. Crazy that I could so easily walk here, but I never do!"

"Probably because if you come here too often, you'll run out of money in no time," Nate pointed out humorously.

"Pff, maybe," Lukan held back a laugh before turning to look down the street and the middle school at the corner, on top of a hill, the same school that sat to the south of home. "Well, I should go before it gets too late, I suppose." Lukan was about to continue by saying goodbye for the night, but was taken by surprise when the cat hugged him from behind.

"See ya later! I had a lot of fun tonight!" Nate exclaimed. "Let me know when you want to hang again!" he added before releasing the bandit faced creature.

"Will do!" Lukan called as he began to walk away from the plaza. Once free of the noise, standing in the driveway to the middle school, Lukan took a deep breath of the wonderfully cold and still air. If what he thought just happened actually happened, then what exactly was the point in confronting Klaus anymore? What was the point in talking to him anymore? Klaus was no longer a creature Lukan needed in life anymore.

So... Why did Lukan feel compelled to seek him out? Closure? Answers? Reconciliation? Perhaps... Those would be the only conceivable reasons Lukan could find.

Lukan turned the corner at the end of the street, where his apartment complex loomed ahead of him a quarter of a mile away. Lukan thought of what was the best way to see the otter. See if he met up in the park like they said they would. Go to his house? Email him? Lukan could hardly imagine that the otter wanted to see him right now. Lukan decided it best to go to the park. Why? Lukan only had a hunch that it would be the place.

It took several moments for Lukan to walk over to the park where he and Klaus had first met. Lukan had come here so often within the past months, under different circumstances each time. It was haunting what Meadowlark Park had meant for him as well as Klaus. And Lukan felt that with tonight, it was going to mean yet another thing for them. His heart beat in his chest as hard as before, but for different and more daunting reason.

Klaus was sitting on a swing in the playground part of the park. He was looking away, with his head in his arms. Lukan knew it. He hesitated heavily. What to say? What to do? Lukan shook his head. This had to be done. He walked up to him slowly, not taking his eyes off of him. He sighed, to get his attention. "I-I knew you'd be here, Klaus."

The otter looked back. His eyes were bloodshot, as if his eyes were still celebrating Christmas. He blinked. And that's when Lukan noticed that there was blood on his arms.