

Nineteen. Mutual Faithlessness

Lukan couldn't believe his eyes, but sure enough, in the glimmering moonlight was a dark crimson running through the arms of the aquatic creature. "K-Klaus...!? Wh-what the fuck!?"

Klaus looked back at him with depressing, and once beautiful eyes. His eyes held another emotion just underneath their stained surfaces. Was it, pleading? Blood was smeared on his face as well, from having his head pressed against the self inflicted injuries. "What are you doing here, Lukan?" He seemed thoroughly upset. Though whether that was because of Lukan's presence, Lukan wasn't entirely sure.

Lukan took a step back, mortified. "Klaus... Wh-why would you...?"

Klaus scoffed. He seemed to have zero energy he wished to invest in any sort of anger any longer. "As if you don't know. Lukan, do you really think I want to be alone? Do you really think I broke up with you because I didn't love you? Don't you have faith in me?" His voice was beyond depression. It was beyond desperation. It was defeated. Broken. Irreparably broken. Lukan couldn't even believe that such a thing was possible.

Lukan shook his head. "A-a better question would be, do you have faith in me?" he countered.

Klaus refrained from moving his eyes even a millimeter off the raccoon's. "What do you mean?" he asked softly.

"I could have helped you to try and get through your problems. I could have been the one to change everything for you, just as you have for me," Lukan explained sadly. "B-but you wouldn't let me. And you left me all alone."

Klaus recoiled slightly. "I know. I fucked up again. My hope was that I did not do to you what Platt did to me. But, I guess love is just too powerful. It got to someone as strong as you."

Lukan studied the otter. There he was going again, speaking like this. "I still don't get what you mean by that, Klaus."

Klaus sighed. "When Platt and I finally met in person, it was a feeling beyond what I can describe, in the best way possible. I felt that I couldn't live without it. That every second I did have to live without it was far, far more painful than anyone could imagine. So when Platt started treating me with less and less love and more and more contempt, I started... Losing myself." Every word that came from the otter's maw now seemed strained and forced. It was evident to Lukan that Klaus desired nothing more than to not talk about any of this. "I was addicted to love. And now, I've gone and afflicted you with such terror as well. In short, Lukan, love is a drug. The most powerful, most addictive, and in the wrong paws, like mine, the most destructive one ever.

Heroin? Meth? Cocaine? They don't have shit on it other than what they physically do. I will never forgive myself for drugging you Lukan. Now that I know what it's like."

Lukan was at a loss for words. He had no idea what to address. The needless apology, the self inflicted wounds the otter has, the drug allegory, the reasons behind why the pair of them were not together at that moment anymore...! All the thoughts Lukan had flew around in his head, spinning and bouncing around, competing against each other to try to be the first to pop out of his mind. In the end it was... "So is that why you've really didn't want to talk to me about it? And why you seemed so upset when I said how lonely I was?" ...the allegory.

Klaus nodded, biting his lip. He seemed about ready to burst into tears again. "Y-yeah. Which is why I want to hurry up and become better again so that I could be the boyfriend you deserve. B-but... Seeing you with that cat. I-I just. I just couldn't take the idea that you may not have wanted me anymore. That I really did fail you. I didn't want to think you had lost all faith in me, but..."

Lukan shook his head. "Klaus, if you had just talked to me about all of this, maybe I would have understood better." Given the state of ind Lukan had when the otter had broken up with him, Lukan was not entirely sure how true that statement would have been. But now they'd never know. Not that it would matter anyways. "And gave me the chance to help you. I-if being alone and hurt by Platt was what made you this way, then why? Why would you think being alone like that would possibly help? Especially since Platt and Will were together and all that. A-at the time."

Klaus' whiskers twitched. "At the time? Wait. A-are they broken up?"

Lukan hesitated a moment before nodding. "I-I saw it with my own eyes. They broke up right here in this park a couple days before Valentine's Day. Platt had had enough of Will's creepy agenda."

Klaus scoffed ruefully. "Hypocrite. It's the same agenda he used as an excuse to break up with me! Bastard."

"No, Klaus!" Lukan cried. "It's not that Platt wanted you to NOT be emotional! He wanted you to be LESS emotional! Platt hated that Will took that to an extreme!"

"Tch. If he took the time to try and understand what I was feeling, then maybe it wouldn't have been an issue," Klaus was still stubborn.

"Klaus, I dunno at all what happened between you and Platt specifically. B-but either way, it just didn't work. Why couldn't you have gotten past that and tried to live a happier life with me!?" Lukan breathed, feeling what was left of his heart started to be ground into dust.

"I... I did not want all the efforts I made for him to go to waste! And even more so, I couldn't take it when I saw just how ungrateful and selfish he was!" Klaus exclaimed.

Lukan, in the back of his mind, wanted to know the specifics of what actually went down between the otter and the silver wolf. He wondered that if he did, he would have been able to figure out for sure what the otter would have needed. Then Lukan had the pessimistic thought that there would be no way to know for sure given the absence of any relationship experience at all! "Then, why don't you tell me exactly what happened between you and Platt? Maybe if you tell me, I'll understand what you feel and why you feel that way a little bit better?" Lukan said in a half demanding voice. Lukan did not intend on sounding that way at all.

Klaus sighed. He sighed deeply, looking off to one side. Lukan knew that expression. Lukan used it many times before. It was the expression where he didn't want to say or admit to anything, but he knew that he had to. That there was no other choice and that no matter the outcome, it wouldn't be good. "I only told you about how he accused me of asking too much of him, right? And that he was being ungrateful for all the things I was doing for him? AND that he was calling me out for my mental health when instead he should have been helping me? Well, that is all you need to know. If we're going to not be together anymore like you seem to want, then I don't want to tell you about it anymore," Klaus said.

Lukan was frustrated. He knew that he needed to know what Klaus was going through in order to help him. If Klaus refused to open up then... "Then there is no way I can help you, you know that right?"

"I cannot take this anymore," Klaus said chillingly. "B-between how alone I am, what Platt did, what Will's doing, what I did to you, and everything else. I just... I just..." And the otter broke down in tears and incapacitated his ability to speak.

What really scared Lukan wasn't the fact that the otter had broken down again. It wasn't even what he said and how he said it. It was the fact that Lukan no longer felt compelled to comfort the wretched creature before him. Lukan, deep down in his soul, felt hints of resentment for what the otter had done. Lukan knew that Klaus was not worth his trust anymore. And despite this, Lukan wanted to sympathize with him. Lukan did want to help. But his physical self. His physical self vetoed all his desires. His heart wanted the otter. But his mind purged the very thought. His mind wanted to continue calling out the creature that Klaus was. His heart wanted to disregard all of it and try and understand him. Lukan had never felt so helpless like this before, and he hated it. "Klaus, I-- Please get some help, Klaus. Allow someone to help you. I-I don't what to do anymore."

Klaus sniffled heavily. "So what about you and that black cat?"

Lukan shrugged. "We're as good as boyfriends now. I really thought you didn't want to be with me anymore. If you did, regardless of anything, you would have never left me. That's my belief." But was it a good belief? Lukan thought of what Aero said. From what the golden fox had said, the implication that it wasn't good resonated

rather strongly in Lukan's memories. Nevertheless, Lukan couldn't deny that this was what he felt.

"And if we stayed together, and I ended up hurting you even further?" Klaus' voice was only half coherent.

"You don't know that," Lukan replied.

"Do you know that?" Klaus countered.

Lukan's voice faltered and quavered. "N-no... But I still think that leaving me like that was the worst possible thing you could have done. Especially if you thought I was under the influence of love's drug, or whatever metaphor you used." Klaus chose to say nothing. Lukan chose to continue speaking. "And... Did you really think that I would be okay with being alone again after all the love and compassion you gave me? Even if I wasn't "addicted" to love, th-that's just ridiculous! I-I can't wait whatever number of months it would have taken to have you back, and it just wouldn't feel the same!" Lukan paused, to momentarily catch his breath. The otter, looking down at his ripped fur and skin, still did not say anything. Lukan was finding it emotionally more and more taxing to keep going at all. "A-and you also realize that in breaking up with me, makes it so I have the right to date whoever I want, right? Y-you're not entitled to me when you cut us off! S-so i-it was beyond uncalled for when you accused me of cheating on you!"

Klaus was still not saying anything and Lukan finally ran out of things to say. With a silent stalemate permeating in the cold midnight air, Lukan decided it best to just leave the otter. The raccoon didn't even say goodbye to him as he turned his tail on him and strode from the park with a long, drawn out sigh. Lukan couldn't believe that the otter would hurt himself like that. Why? Did the otter really regret what he believed he did that badly? What did this otter truly feel? What did he truly believe? Lukan knew that he was never going to find out. Lukan wanted to help the otter. Despite everything he still wanted to help him. But he felt physically repelled from the idea purely because the otter wasn't proving to him that he wanted to be helped at all. Why even bother if the other creature would just keep pushing him away?!

Lukan sauntered into his apartment, mind still not leaving the otter alone. At the end of the day, all Lukan hoped for was that he would be okay again someday. Maybe the otter he fell in love with would come back. But Lukan felt that if the otter continued the way that he was, then that positive prospect could never come to fruition.

The next day, Lukan realized with shock that it was the first day of March. The gallows of the everlasting winter that plagued Lilac Grove for far longer than it was welcome would soon begin to dwindle. Lukan couldn't wait for such a day that the cool, but not too cold, temperatures would return in early spring. But it leading to the

worse of the extreme temperatures that is summer was something Lukan dreaded. But for the time being, the weather remained beyond freezing standards.

Lukan was due for work yet again. Now that he and Nate were together, essentially-- No. Were they though? It was clear that they indicated to each other that they wanted to be together, but did they actually make the call to be so? Lukan could not remember. All that was in his mind was the otter and his esoteric ways of thinking.

Work though. Lukan wasn't sure how well today was going to go. With Nate and Klaus on his mind on top of Will, Platt, and Aero, how was he going to survive? Klaus in particular was going to be the bane of his concentration.

"Ringtail!" And cue Eira Farus Tharo once again to make matters potentially worse. Lukan was on the verge of just giving in and letting her bother him at this point. She came dashing up to him as he was about to clock in. "How're you today?"

Lukan grimaced. "I'm surviving," he said simply, punching himself into the time clock, signifying the start of this particular work day.

Eira cocked her head to one side. "Well, I heard that there was an outburst between a raccoon and an otter at the McMurry Cafe downtown yesterday. It reminded me of you and Klaus actually. There are rumors that the two of them were a gay couple. Did you hear about this?"

Lukan grimaced even more. At least she didn't assume or know that it actually was between him and Klaus. "I-I didn't!" Lukan lied.

"Hang on..." Eira studied the raccoon. It naturally made Lukan feel uncomfortable. "That necklace. My friend mentioned that the raccoon wore one. Was that you, Lukan!?" she cried out. Many of the nearby creatures in the back room that heard her turned their gazes upon them, forcing a small cringe of discomfort from the raccoon.

Lukan sighed. At this point, he no longer cared what anyone thought or said about him. All he wanted was put the storm raging between him and the other five creatures to be put to rest for good. He was simply too annoyed to give a damn anymore. "Okay yes, that was me. Are you going to bother me about it for the rest of the year, then?" he snapped.

Eira's eyed widened. "I-I just..." She seemed genuinely hurt by Lukan's unusually harsh tone. Why though? This wasn't the first time Lukan had used it against her. What was different this time? Immediately, Lukan started to feel bad about it.

"Eira, I-I'm sorry. I didn't mean to--"

The vixen held up a paw to silence him. "Don't worry about it. I get it. I've been trying to change ever since that other fox talked to me. But I was just curious. I'll just go now." Without letting Lukan try to apologize any further, the vixen walked past him towards the grocery side of the back room.

Lukan sighed to himself. What had he just done? A voice in his head told him about how frustrated he was about everything, everything that was going on. He wanted all of it to just disappear. He couldn't focus on all of it. Hardly any of it made any sense at all anyway. He wanted to take his anger out on something. His frustrations overwhelmed his mind. It all turned him into something he didn't want to be. Lukan, even more mentally destabilized than ever tried and failed to clear his head before moving towards the same area of the back room that Eira had gone. When there, the vixen was nowhere to be found. Even at work now, the atmosphere had become just that much more eerily quiet after Lukan upset her. The silence was a deceptive beast, for Lukan knew that there was a storm raging within its ambience. The silence may as well be the storm itself. Yet it rang so loudly in Lukan's head that the idea would be paradoxical at best. Or perhaps, did the snep have a point, and it is all just in his head? Lukan wanted to stop thinking. He wanted to stop worrying. He wanted to stop feeling the way he was. He either wanted the storm to disperse, and be replaced by the answers needed to do so, or just stop feeling altogether. Perhaps. The snep may have been right all along? Lukan felt the urge to find him as soon as he could. But he knew he would have to wait after work before he could. Maybe he could let Will help him clear his mind enough to focus, but not so much so that he would end up like the snep himself? This was the only answer that he could think of anymore.

So once work was over several hours later, Lukan made it his mission to attempt to seek out the snep and request at least a little bit of help from him. But... Lukan had no idea where to even begin looking for him. Will could be anywhere. Wherever the hell he lived, the store, the park, anywhere in town? Shit. Lukan hated when such a thing happened. Could want to avoid the creature as much as he could, turn the corner and there he was! But when Lukan wanted to seek someone out, they would no longer exist in this world.

Lukan debated for a few moments on whether he should visit the Richtors. Not Klaus, but his family. Lukan wanted to know whether they were doing alright, given their monetary struggles. It had been a while since Lukan had last spoken to Kristina, Kuaren, or Kandice. He hoped that they were doing well enough. One thing was for sure, he did not want to say goodbye to either of them.

"Wh-what?! N-no way! A-are you crazy!?" That voice! Lukan felt his heart rate speeding up faster than it had gone in recent times. That was--!

"Some creatures say I am. You didn't seem that way when we first met." And that voice too! Lukan was flabbergasted. That was Nate and Will, talking to each other near Klaus' house! But why!? Lukan ducked behind a parked car several yards away, making sure they couldn't see him.

"B-but to do this would surely-!" Nate seemed shocked about something. What had Will said to him?

Will cut him off. "I know. And that is the point, Nate. You've done the first thing that you needed to do, and now it's time for you to take the next step!"

Nate was almost hyperventilating due to how sporadic his breath rate seemed to Lukan from the distance he was from them. "I-I don't think I can do this, Will."

"Oh? Have my lessons started to come undone? Your uncertainty is exactly what will hurt us. It's the last thing we need!" Will growled.

"This isn't..." Nate breathed. He seemed to hold his breath, or so Lukan assumed, because he couldn't hear his heavy breathing for an additional several seconds. It seemed to last forever. How long was that cat able to hold his breath like that? Then after an eternity, the cat spoke, sounding as if he wasn't winded at all anymore. "Okay. Fine. If you believe there isn't any other way, then I guess I have no other choice, do I?"

"That's a good boy," Will replied approvingly. "Well? Get to it then. I'll wait by my car. Let me know how it goes." What the hell was actually going on? Lukan wanted to peek his head to see, but was worried one of them would see him. That was when Lukan heard quiet paw steps in the snow heading in his direction. Lukan felt blood draining from his paws and tail. Idiot coon had decided to hide behind the snow leopard's car! "Better stay quiet coon, if you know what's good for you," the snep said chillingly when he was very clearly just on the other side of the vehicle. Lukan could not bring himself to respond if he even wanted to.

He heard a few knocks on a wooden door in the distance. Putting clues together allowed Lukan to guess that Nate had knocked on Klaus' family's door. It opened after a few seconds. He could hear Kristina's kind voice echoing into the cold air, but it was too quiet for Lukan to discern any words at all. Then he heard his new boyfriend's voice reverberating in the air. Nope. No discernable words there either. He heard Will growl angrily. Will was able to hear exactly what was being said. Lukan hated that he could and the raccoon couldn't. Lukan heard more pawsteps. Nate.

"Klaus isn't home. What do we do?" Nate pondered. "And she didn't know where he went."

"I heard," Will replied simply. "Well, we can try again later."

"This is crazy though!" Nate exclaimed. "I cannot believe you want me to ch--!" but the snep hissed out an interjection.

"Shush! Be quiet!" he hissed. "Trust me okay? Something like this is the only way we can get them to understand."

"I wish there was a better way," Nate replied.

"Is that regret I detect there? We cannot have that you know," Will growled.

"I-" Nate's voice cracked. It sounded like the cat didn't want to be there and/or was contemplating his decisions that led him there. Lukan still had no inkling of what was going on. Then Nate sighed. "Alright. I understand." Lukan's heart pounded even harder. So much so he could swear that not only could the cats hear it, but it also pounded with enough force to potentially vibrate through the car so they could feel it too! And yet, neither of them made any indication that they could detect it. Nate was being brainwashed by Will... There was no way! This couldn't be; it made so little sense! The cat seemed so shy. So into Lukan. Just like Lukan. How could he be trying to learn how to become absolutely apathetic given these feelings?! Lukan's head was spinning. Lukan came out to look for Will to find a way to reduce the load in his mind, not expand it even further than it already was!? Lukan wanted to run. He also wanted to confront the pair of them on what the fuck they were planning on doing. But the last thing he wanted was to create yet another situation for himself. But if his suspicions were true, then it was destined to happen again anyway! What was the point in evading it?! Yet, despite knowing that he needed to, that there was no avoiding anything, and that sooner or later he was going to have to bring this up to Nate in particular, Lukan kept himself parked just out of their view on the other side of the car. He knew he was going to be discovered by Nate too given that he sat on his haunches, just underneath the passenger side. Lukan didn't know what he needed to do let alone how he was going to do it anymore. What were they talking about? Why was Nate caught up in this? What did they want with Klaus? Lukan felt like he was going to pass out. They were just more questions to add to the immeasurable pile that was already eating his brain alive! Worst of all, Lukan wasn't even sure he really and truly wanted to know their answers, but he was going to find out anyways.