

Twenty-Two. Benign Flood

Lukan found himself dumbstruck. Surprised. In awe that Klaus would ask such a thing. Had the otter read his mind? Lukan, didn't answer. He couldn't will himself to speak.

Klaus looked at him sadly. "I never did stop loving you, you know. It's because I still do that I was so upset when I saw you and Nate together. B-but I totally understand if you don't want to given the completely hopeless mess that I am y-ya know?" he laughed ruefully and nervously as if he already knew what Lukan was going to say.

"Don't be silly Klaus," Lukan was finally able to allow himself to speak. "Truth is, I've missed you, so much. I never wanted to let you go and I still don't. I am so glad you got to stay here in Lilac Grove, but..."

"Heh," Klaus interjected. "I stayed behind because I still wanted to be around you Lukan, especially after I realized what I was doing to you. And I was right too, since Will and Nate's actions were proving my thoughts. In retrospect, I should have gotten your forgiveness confirmed before staying. Had I stayed and you still hated me then..." he trailed off, looking as though he was going to burst into tears.

"B-but I never hated you, Klaus!" Lukan exclaimed. "Never have, and I never ever will! I love you, okay?"

Klaus' cheeks turned pink. "Y-you do still love me, after all this, Lukan?" he whispered, sounding hopeful.

Lukan smiled at the otter, walking up to him. "Does this answer your question?" And without letting the otter speak another word, Lukan planted his lips right onto the otter's and proceeded to kiss him for the first time in several months. And for the first time in even more months than that, the kiss felt like it meant something again. Lukan felt desire glue their mouths together. The desire for it to never end again now that it has finally restarted. The rekindling of hope and joy set a fire in Lukan's heart, burning away and stripping the sadness that he had endured since the otter's birthday. The pair of revitalized lovers held each other close, wrapping their arms around each other as they embraced closer and closer together. The return of the otter's radiant warmth flooded his body, dispelling all the frozen darkness like an antivirus. The embrace was wetter than Lukan remembered. Then he realized with a skip of his heartbeat that the otter was crying softly and the tears soaked into Lukan's facial fur. Tears of joy, Lukan knew. He felt his own welling into his eyes as happiness overtook him and his weakened heart, no longer accustomed to such strong positive emotion, threatened to have his eyes explode with water.

It took a minute for the kiss to be broken. And neither of them seemed to want it to end, nor did they seem willing to break it. Klaus looked at Lukan with disbelief in his soaking eyes, panting softly. "It does, Lukan. It really does- I- I can't thank you enough! I-I promise I'll never do anything to hurt you again! I-I swear it!"

Lukan laughed softly, giving Klaus another peck on the cheek. "I'll hold you to your word, silly otter."

Klaus flushed and shuffled his paws. "This is going to sound really bad, but... Now that we're back together, I honestly don't know what we should do now!"

"Anything. Anything you want, my love." Oh how Lukan missed saying that. Saying it again alone overflowed Lukan's brain with dopamine and he could feel each individual protein blasting away his qualms.

Klaus looked thoughtful for a moment. "Well, it's really fucking hot out. I could go for a swim to cool off."

Lukan felt his face growing warmer and it wasn't because of the newborn summer's heat. The prospect of seeing the otter with very little in the way of clothing once again sent his heart pounding hard in his chest. Klaus took notice to this.

"I think the coonie likes the idea," he giggled softly, sniffing lightly.

"Sh-shuddup!" Lukan protested, swatting at the otter playfully.

The otter dodged him with a giggle of his own. "I missed this, you know?" Klaus went up to nuzzle Lukan on the shoulder.

"I did too," Lukan sighed contentedly. "Now we have it back, right?"

"Absolutely. And we'll never lose it again, right?"

"We better not!" Lukan's eyes widened.

"Good! Now, how about that swim, huh?"

Klaus chose the public pool inside the recreation center on the other side of Lilac Grove. Why the otter chose this was, to Lukan's understanding, because as an indoor pool, it wasn't going to be hot whenever they weren't in the water. Lukan had argued that the pool would cool them down to the point where the otter's point was moot, but alas, Klaus had control over driving wherever and Lukan did not. Lukan knew he was at a disadvantage there.

Klaus' truck had started working again when the weather was no longer mimicking the arctic. They deduced that something must have frozen something in the truck-- Neither of them knew anything about cars.

Once there, Lukan gasped with dismay at how busy the place was. Of course it was. Summer. No school. Lots of heat. All five of the rec center's areas were nearly completely booked! The game rooms that held pool, foosball, ping pong tables, and more. The gymnasium. The outdoor park and picnic area. The ice skating rink. And of course, the swimming pool.

"Dear lord, there are so many creatures in here," Lukan hissed to Klaus, but was certain the otter couldn't hear him over the cacophony of voices surrounding them. The otter's unresponsiveness confirmed this this suspicion. Klaus looked undeterred, however. He even reached down and grabbed Lukan's hand, holding it. Lukan tried not to blush and half hoped nobody would notice.

The line progressed slowly. Agonizingly slowly. It felt like seconds converted to minutes, which in turn, leveled up into hours. Lukan wasn't even sure they could get in before closing time. In the back of Lukan's mind, he knew he was being impatient. He looked over to Klaus, whose expression of happiness did not change. It seemed that all Klaus did truly care about was being with Lukan. He didn't give a damn what else. Lukan wished he felt the same way. It made him feel doubtful that he'd be an acceptable partner for Klaus. Lukan almost slapped himself. Why the fuck was he doubting himself already!? He was aghast at the idea that he was!

"We would like to get into the pool, please?" Klaus suddenly spoke, and Lukan realized as he fell back onto planet Earth that they were finally up at the desk. The receptionist was an old coyote lady with enormous glasses. She blinked, looking right in between them where their hands were held.

She squinted as she responded. "As long as you all know the rules of our pool, then that'll be twenty dollars for two creatures to each get a day pass at there."

What odd wording, Lukan observed. For what reason did she-- Lukan realized it. He almost flushed a perfect scarlet and looked down at their paws to try and hide any redness he did show.

Klaus paid up with one hand, while gripping Lukan's harder with the other. "Come on, let's go," he said, tugging on the raccoon as he grabbed the passes. The way to the pool was just behind the receptionist's desk. Lukan remembered from his cubhood when he had come often. He wondered how much had changed in thirteen years.

The locker rooms were just down another hall past the doors. Boys on the left. Girls on the right. The pool itself was straight ahead some more. Lukan smelled the chlorine in the air and let out a soft gag. "The chlorine alone keeps me from swimming anymore," he stated. "It's uh... It's been since eighth grade that I last went swimming, you know?" he added sheepishly.

Klaus looked down at him in surprise. "No kidding? I was on the high school swim team!"

Lukan nudged the otter's tail. "Of course you were! Otters were built to swim! Us raccoons were built to climb. Eeeeven though I've never actually tried to do that," he added even more sheepishly.

Klaus laughed aloud as they entered the locker room. "Silly coonie! Now, what lockers did we get?" The keys to the lockers were attached to the swim passes. "I got 147. You?"

Lukan examined the key, reading it aloud. "149. I'm right close to yours," he observed.

"Heh. Did she do that on purpose. I saw her eyes looking at our holding hands," Klaus remarked.

"I-I saw that too. I-I wonder what she thought..." Lukan trailed off, thinking again about just that. He didn't get very far in doing so.

"I don't really care," Klaus shrugged. "Let's get changed then."

Lukan held his breath as they took their short, slippery walk over to their lockers. Various other male creatures were around, of course, changing in and out of their suits, some more naked than others. Lukan could not help but look as he walked, feeling his heart jump every time he saw one naked. He was also incredibly wary of some of them spotting him staring, but his curiosity got the better of him. He shook his head as it was filled with such lewd images as he and Klaus reached their lockers, and to Lukan's dismay as well as excitement, a naked fox was changing right next to them. The creature was facing away from both of them. The well built slender russet furred body, the long, bushy tail. Vulpine scent hung in the air immediately around him and Lukan could never forget the fox's--

"You're seeing the main reason I joined the swim team," Klaus snapped Lukan back into reality. Then Lukan felt it. Mortified.

"Oh my god! Klaus, I am so sorry, I didn't mean to--!"

Klaus silenced him with a small laugh. "It's okay. I get it. I'm kind of the same way, but I got better at controlling it. Still didn't change how much I used to want some of these guys, heh," he added with a blush.

"Guess it doesn't matter, now that you have me, right?" Lukan prompted shakily.

Klaus started to take off his shirt. "Yes. That is true." The otter's bare torso made Lukan's face turn pink again. He missed this sight as well. He missed everything about the otter and his body. He knew the otter must have felt the same, so he in turn, began undressing himself as well.

When the pair of them were down to their underwear, Klaus whistled. "I almost forgot just how handsome you are," he remarked.

Lukan turned so red it would put tomatoes to shame. "Sh-shut up! I feel the same way about you, you know!"

Klaus looked at Lukan. It flustered Lukan, as it always had. Some things never change. Then, without any warning at all and with surprising swiftness, Klaus bent over and yanked Lukan's underwear down to his ankles, completely exposing the procyon. Lukan yelped and achieved maximum redness in his face, instinctively covering himself

up with his arms. It didn't work. "My, my," Klaus said softly. "My boyfriend really does have a wonderful body, doesn't he?"

Lukan, filled with indignance, retaliated against the otter by doing the same thing and pulled the otter's final garment of clothing down to his ankles. The otter, however, did not react as strongly as Lukan did. In fact, it backfired, for the otter's beautiful, exposed body somehow made Lukan go even redder.

"You're just the most adorable thing on the planet," Klaus stuck out his tongue as he reached for his swim trunks.

"N-no you are!" Lukan exclaimed indignantly, reaching for his.

"Says the raccoon with a body like that," Klaus replied seductively, winking at him.

Lukan was so flustered by this point, he felt he could faint from it. "Th-that goes quadruple for you!" he exclaimed.

"Quintuple," Klaus replied simply, pulling one leg into the trunks, giving Lukan quite a view. Lukan knew he did that on purpose.

"S-sextuple!" Lukan cried.

"Oh my. How very lewd and eager of you, Lukan," Klaus winked, pulling up what Lukan needed to not be as distracted by the otter's body. Key word: as. As distracted.

"Sh-shuddup!" Lukan echoed himself from earlier, stomping his paw.

Klaus only giggled. He grabbed Lukan's arm before Lukan was even completely done pulling up his trunks and yanked on it. "Come on! Let's go!"

Lukan, taken by surprise, yelped again as the otter dragged him through the locker room and towards the huge room with the pool, swim trunks threatening to fall down what height they had gained. At least they were up enough to where he wasn't exposed anymore, the raccoon thought. Lukan felt his feet slipping and sliding on the wet floor as Klaus dragged him, worried they would slip and fall. No running was a rule for a reason...

Despite Lukan's worry, they had made it to the pool in piece. The loud sound of water falling echoed in Lukan's ears as many of the pools attractions that he knew and loved or hated reentered his vision for the first time in nearly a decade and a half. Klaus wasted no time at all and descended the stairs that led into the shallow side of the pool, wading expertly in with his perfectly built body. "Come on in, coonie!" the otter waved to him.

Lukan followed the otter in, not as quickly or as eagerly as he was and joined him in the waist deep water. "It's been years since I've been in here!" he said.

"Same actually," Klaus replied as he waded into the deeper water. "It's pretty nostalgic." That otter moved expertly in the water, as if the density of water completely failed to slow him down. Lukan tried to follow, but the water found itself successful in hindering his movements.

"Hey no fair! I can't move as well as you!" Lukan protested as Klaus tripled his distance from his reunited boyfriend. "Told you, you have a better body than mine!"

A few nearby creatures turned their heads curiously towards Lukan, who realized too late what his words just implied. He tried not to read any of their expressions.

Klaus turned around and swam up to Lukan so quickly it was like he teleported himself. The otter tapped Lukan on the thigh with his tail, smiling. "Hey if we went rock climbing or something instead, I'm sure you'd have me beat there. Hence, you have a better body than mine." Klaus stuck his tongue out again before maneuvering towards the deeper end once again.

Lukan struggled and stumbled as he attempted to follow the otter, feeling his body sinking further into the water as it got deeper. "W-well maybe we should do that next!" he exclaimed. He didn't even know if the rec center even had a rock wall. His high school did, but that was all he knew.

"I agree!" Klaus called after him. "With you being so high above me, I get a real good look at you from below!"

All the blood in Lukan's body rushed to his face once more. "O-Oh my g-god!" Was all the flustered coon could make himself say. On top of such flattery, he was certain that half of the pool goers had heard the otter's words. Lukan tried his best not to look at any of them and focus on Klaus, and Klaus alone. It was hard to, given how crowded the place actually was. A tiger drifted into view with their eyes on Lukan. They were obviously in disapproval, something Lukan did not want to see. How could Klaus not care when there are creatures who hurt each other based on what or who they like?! Lukan looked away, flinching. But nothing came of the negative attention. Lukan shuddered lightly as he attempted to follow Klaus into the deeper end of the pool, where it was considerably less populated. Then his paws left the ground and Lukan felt his muzzle dipping under. Lukan was a very weak swimmer, if he even still retained the miniscule strength he had years ago when he last swam. He was too wary to even try and find out right then. Klaus noticed this as Lukan pushed himself back to the shallower waters before he went too far and swam back up to him.

"Looks like we need to surgically give you webs between your fingers and toes, and sadly replace that beautiful fluffy ringed tail with one like mine!" he teased.

"At least then I will look almost as handsome as you," Lukan retorted in a low and quiet voice to avoid getting more unwanted attention.

"Oh come on, you know you surpass me in that regard, by far, right?" Klaus splashed Lukan with water, leaving a sputtering raccoon surprised.

"I beg to differ!" Lukan splashed water in retaliation as he emphasized the last word.

Lukan could swear he heard a creature yell out to them, "Oh my god, just go get a room already!" but was too focused on the otter and his simply outlandish compliments to give it immediate attention, although his mind was swayed towards it somewhat.

Klaus frowned. "Lukan, you do need to just learn to ignore the world and focus on what really matter. I remember a certain raccoon telling me to do something similar."

Lukan sighed. "I just see so many stories about gays getting hurt or even killed because you know..."

"It doesn't happen nearly as as often as you think, silly creature." Klaus still retained his upbeat attitude. The attitude that rekindled along with their relationship. It took Lukan until now to realize that the otter he had fallen in love with had come back. Or was Klaus trying harder to push down his dark thoughts? Lukan couldn't help but feel that it was too good to be true that it was as if Klaus had finally dispelled them. Knowing how this otter often really felt... Lukan started to think in the back of his mind that it was nothing but a facade once again. Or was it true, and that all along Klaus just needed to know that he was loved by him?

"Coonie mind is wandering away from us again isn't it?" Klaus scowled as Lukan seemed to look right past him and out a huge glass window that made up the entire wall in the back of the pool and into the park.

"S-sorry," Lukan mumbled.

Klaus splashed water into the raccoon's face again. "You really are a silly creature. You kind of worry me when you do that. Whatcha thinkin' about this time?"

"O-oh nothing. Just what our future would be like now that we're back together," Lukan lied straight through his teeth.

"Wonderful. It will be more than just wonderful! We'll take on life together, and win!" Klaus nodded firmly. "Together, we'll be unstoppable!" Klaus proceeded to squeeze the procyon's body so tightly, Lukan could hear his bones and joints cracking in the water.

"Gyah!" Lukan half yelped, half choked as he was taken by surprise by the otter's surprising strength. "I-I hope so!" he struggled to say. The otter released him in the second that followed and began swimming effortlessly to the deep end of the pool, where it was predominantly populated by aquatic creatures like himself. Lukan could only sit where his paws could still touch the floor of the pool, for the thought of even trying to swim after so many years unnerved him.

The otter looked over to him, his handsome head being the only thing above the water. "Hey coonie, come on over here!" he called.

Lukan felt his eyes widen. "N-no thank you!" he stammered out, not even sure if the otter could hear him.

The otter looked disappointed as he swam back to the raccoon in record time, grabbed his arm, and proceeded to pull the now protesting ring-tailed creature to the deep end. "Come on, now!"

"Let me go, you evil creature!" Lukan cried as he fruitlessly tried to fight against Klaus' strength, flailing arms, legs, and tail, but he knew there would be no avail fighting a creature in his own element.

The otter did not let go. "You'll be fine!" The otter then began to cradle the raccoon in his arms, using his strong legs alone to keep them afloat. The raccoon yelped in instinctive fright as he felt water surge around the back of his head, but the sight of the otter's eyes above him calmed him down almost immediately. "You know I would never let anything bad happen to you, right?"

"I-I," Lukan stammered, running out of words. He was never more happy for that to happen before this point, however.

"Kiss! Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!" chanted a creature behind them. Lukan couldn't identify who it was, but it nonetheless incited a blush from him.

Klaus giggled. "You heard the man," he said. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't do as he says." He said that as if he dared the raccoon to even try, and as if he knew there would be nothing he could say to stop the inevitable.

"B-because he's not the boss of you?" Lukan breathed, too distracted by the face right above his to be able to think. Thinking was all Lukan could ever do, and yet, here was this otter. This wonderful, beautiful otter, taking that ability away from him to allow him to do something else. And that something else commenced the second Lukan felt his muzzle connect with Klaus' once again, sealing a tender kiss between the two.

Lukan was barely aware of a couple of creatures around them exchanging "Awww"s behind them. Were Lukan's assumptions of Llac Grove, and thus, the world, wrong? Were other creatures truly benign enough to be accepting of each other? Lukan remembered his misanthropy, and the intolerance in the world being its catalyst. Lukan no longer cared. All he wanted was the otter's embrace to never end.

But seconds later, it did end. "Sorry Lukan, but I can't hold you up for much longer; my arms are killing me!" The otter carried the raccoon back to shallower waters where he let him down.

Lukan was somewhat indignant. "A-are you calling me fat?!"

Klaus giggled. "No. I'm calling myself weak. But don't you see? There are plenty of creatures out there that aren't bad at all! That's what I want you to know, okay? I mean sure, there's some real nasty folk out there too. But not as many as you'd think! That's what I need to know too, considering Will, Platt, and Nate. Aero seems like the only guy we could trust, right?"

Lukan hesitated. "Well, Nate just seemed misguided by Will and wanted what was best. If he was truly bad... He wouldn't have told me what he and Will were planning that night."

"Still..." Klaus trailed off with a scowl.

"Do you still hate him for nearly taking me as his boyfriend, Klaus?" Lukan pondered worriedly.

"Nah, it's not that," Klaus responded, sounding certain. "I just am not so sure that the bad creatures there are could change for the better just like that, that's all."

"Well," Lukan ventured. "You seem to be an example of a creature who can."

"What's that mean?" Klaus retained a scowl. Lukan did not like either of their most recent word choices.

"I-I mean, you were so down in the dumps for so long this year, and... and now that we're back together, i-it feels like the otter I fell in love with in November is finally back again." Lukan tried, but felt he failed to, explain himself.

"Having you by my side again is all I need in order to feel happy again," Klaus replied, confirming Lukan's previous hopes and filling the raccoon's mending heart with joy.

"I dunno, if you'd believe me if I told you just how happy that makes me, Klaus. I think I'm gonna cry!" Lukan exclaimed, feeling tears representing that joy in his eyes. It wasn't like Lukan to be this emotional, and he knew it! But it was such an indescribably amazing feeling, that he ignored that.

"And I will make sure that I keep you that way from now on. I promise!" Klaus hugged the raccoon again. "Now come on, let's go get on those water slides!"

Lukan giggled with Klaus as they began to enjoy the rest of that day together. It was going to be one that Lukan knew he was going to never forget, even with his poor memory. To think that the light within the horizon of the future had rekindled itself and shined even brighter than ever before filled Lukan with more hope than Lukan felt he had ever had in his life. It began to feel like all the troubles he had before were starting to at last melt away. He hoped that soon, they would all be gone forever.

