

Twenty-Three. The River

Lukan and Klaus, tired from their full day at the swimming pool in the rec center across town from where they lived, walked back to their lockers with nothing short of happiness on their faces, soaking and dripping wet. They each exchanged loving looks at one another as their fur dripped water as they went. The otter looked so much more beautiful when he was soaking wet while Lukan was convinced he looked nothing short of ridiculous. But he knew that if he were to bring this up, the otter would just fluster him into oblivion citing just how much he thought on the contrary.

They had spent nearly all day there; there were hardly any creatures left and it felt odd to see just how the population of the place went from overcrowded to nearly a ghost town over the course of just hours.

"We should probably go shower so we can get as much chlorine off us as we can," Klaus noted as they stopped just short of their lockers, the showers just in the edge of Lukan's vision.

All Lukan could smell was the dastardly and malodorous chemical. There was nothing Lukan even wanted to say in disagreement. "Definitely. I can't smell the otter-ness of my boyfriend and it upsets me!" he replied, wide eyed.

Klaus giggled. "Dorky creature. But that's one of the many things I just love about you." Klaus took Lukan by the wet and wrinkly hand with his own and walked with Lukan to the showers. Klaus did the honors by turning the thing on and it sprayed out hot water with enough pressure and force to imitate a massage. Klaus let Lukan step in first, and the procyon was almost surprised at how hot the water was. Being out of the pool in a cold environment was a shock to his system. The otter followed him in with a bright smile on his face. For an unknown reason, Lukan had expected the otter to shower separately in one next to him. As soon as the otter joined him, Lukan knew that he should have seen that coming. The otter placed his paws on Lukan's waist at the hem of his swim trunks. "We're a tad overdressed for a shower aren't we?" There was a smirk on his face.

Lukan flushed immediately, and he knew where this was liable to go. "K-Klaus... H-here? In public?"

Klaus started to pull down Lukan's swim trunks without wavering that loving smirk on his face. "There's hardly anyone here. And it doesn't close for another hour anyway," he said softly. "And besides, how is the chlorine gonna be washed from here if these trunks get in the way?"

Lukan felt himself flushing deeper as he felt his trunks sliding down his legs without his hands being on them. They went down slowly. Soaked trunks along soaked fur made for quite a trial in removing them. But alas, after a minute of pulling, they

were down at Lukan's ankles. Lukan stepped over them, keeping his eyes firmly locked with the otter's. But that lasted for only a moment, for the otter bent down to remove his trunks as well, kicking both of them aside once he won that clingy fight. Lukan fought the urge to look down for he knew what would happen if he did. But did he want that to happen? In his mind, Lukan could feel that desire, stronger than it has ever been before for him to just let things happen. But the idea of it all. In a public shower. It made him nervous and on edge. He knew he shouldn't be doing this. But with his naked otter lover right next to him, that edge was not prevailing.

Lukan yipped. A jolt of electricity surged through every neuron in his entire body as he felt the otter touch him right where it counts. He gasped when the touch grew increasingly more firm. The back of his mind was fighting his arousal. The front of his mind egged it on. There was a storm in Lukan's mind, a different one from the months prior, and he had no idea what to do about it. But Klaus made that decision for him. The second he felt the otter's breath inside his own mouth again, that was it. Lukan submitted right there and then, feeling himself grow in Klaus' inappropriately wandering paw as their maws locked together. Water pouring over them, an electric touch, and the softness of the otter's tongue against his own. That was all Lukan needed to decide and lose control over himself. His own paws wandered to Klaus to mirror every movement that the otter was making, but the otter was already on his way out, presumably already turned on by the idea of what they were doing. Their kiss only grew deeper as their arousals grew to their fullest sizes. Lukan moaned deep into Klaus' maw and fell against his body, pushing him against the shower wall as he felt the otter pistoning his fist along Lukan. He felt the otter against him, clearly rubbing both of them simultaneously. Lukan felt immense warmth, warmer than even the water flowing over them in his maw and groin, the hotspots of the action. The rubbing continued as long as the kiss did. An eternity. An eternity that Lukan felt he was more than blessed to witness. The utter pleasure of every movement of the otter's hand, and the otter's tongue made forced the squirming raccoon's body to rub up against the otter even more. All the while, Lukan still held in the back of his mind where they were and tried to keep his pleased moans to a minimal volume, but wasn't focused enough to know whether that was working at all or not. Lukan grunted deeply into the otter's maw after a few moments, finishing against the otter first, gasping. Still they continued to kiss passionately, making out as the otter climaxed just seconds after Lukan, washing them both off under the shower. But even though they had reached their ends, they still held each other with the tightest of hugs, not even breaking the kiss to express how wonderful they felt.

"Hey!" The deep, heavy voice jolted Lukan so much that he jumped, hitting the otter's chin hard with his head causing the otter to let out a barely stifled cry. Tears welled in his eyes. "Hurry it up in there! We're closing in ten minutes!"

Seconds later, when the source of the voice had gone, Klaus exclaimed. "Oooow I bit my tongue!"

"Oh Klaus!" Lukan breathed. "I'm so sorry! I-I thought we were caught and--!"

Klaus, who had one paw to his hurt muzzle, held the other to Lukan's muzzle to quiet him. "It's okay. Don't worry. We gotta go though, as you can tell."

Lukan only nodded, his body shaking from the shock of thinking they were caught as well as the fact he just hurt his boyfriend in such a way. But Klaus was right. There was no time to waste.

Water shut off, fur dried, and clothes on in five minutes flat was what followed. Once out of the locker room, Lukan and Klaus saw the source of the voice ahead of them. An imposing rottweiler security guard walked in their direction, and he did not look at all pleased. He glared at them as the raccoon and otter passed. The creature did not say a word to either of them as he went towards the locker rooms in the opposite direction.

"Do you think he knows...?" Lukan whispered to Klaus, trailing off and not finishing his question.

"I don't know," Klaus replied as they reach the reception desk. The entire place seemed completely abandoned. Such a stark contrast to earlier in the day was off putting to Lukan. They wordlessly left the building.

The days prior to Klaus' birthday seemed to have returned, Lukan thought. Lukan wanted to hope they did. He wanted to hope that they would stay that way. Luck seemed to be on his side. The remainder of June was filled with nothing but the otter's love and joy. They refused to let each other stay out of each others' sights for too long ever again. This was complicated when they both had to go to work, but much to Lukan's delight, Klaus had gotten a job at a recently built movie theater that was across the street from the Japanese restaurant that Lukan and Nate went to, so the creature was never far away. Lukan spent all of the free time that he could in the otter's company, doing whatever that came to their mind first. Klaus was always the one to decide with Lukan's mind shouting everything imaginable at the very same planck time as one another. Most of the time, Klaus did choose to go swimming. Lukan was certain their fur was going to turn green from that eventually, and he still couldn't stand the smell of chlorinated water for too long. The raccoon failed to muster up any care for that, however; all he wanted was the otter. Lukan also became more accustomed to the idea of them getting intimate in the locker room showers when it was mostly vacant. The security guard seemed more and more unhappy with their presence, but Klaus insisted on not caring at all what he may think.

As July started, the heat of the summer was truly setting in, soaking Lukan's fur not with pool water, but with sweat. Lukan wasn't sure which he hated more, the

stickiness of sweat, or the chemically malodorous pool water. Lukan was at Klaus' again for the first time since they had broken up and it depressed Lukan to see the place to be almost deserted. Only the few things that Klaus had remained, as well as the big furniture. Klaus said that the rest of his family packed what they could in their car, and just left. On top of the building being halfway to condemnation, it made Klaus' living accommodations look even more bleak.

"Klaus, maybe my mom and I can move in and help you out with all this," Lukan offered.

Klaus immediately jumped on the idea with happiness gleaming in his eyes. Such brightness was the brightest light in the entire house. "I would so love that!" he exclaimed.

"Well," Lukan pressed on, "we have to wait until our lease is done in November, of course."

Klaus nodded. "Can't just leave them hanging like that, I gotcha."

"Will you be okay until then, though?" Lukan asked, feeling concerned for the otter's well being, and guilty because he couldn't do more to help yet.

The otter gave his raccoon the biggest hug Lukan had in a long time, licking him affectionately on the cheek. "I'll manage, don't worry," he said.

"Are you sure, Klaus?" Despite Klaus' optimism and confidence, Lukan still felt Klaus would need help. A two bedroom house by himself? Off a job at a movie theater? Even if the house was falling apart, there was no way Klaus could do that in an economy as decimated as it was!

Klaus nodded firmly. "I feel like I could do anything!"

Lukan laughed. "Haha! Well, just be careful, okay? If something happens, my mom and I would be more than happy to have you! We'll have to hide you from our landlord though."

Klaus graced Lukan with yet another one of his soon to be trademarked super hard and tight otter hugs that Lukan both loved and hated. It somehow seemed a lot stronger than the one he just gave him a moment ago! "I can't wait to live with you, regardless!"

"W-well! With how often we stay at each others' places, we kinda already do in a way!" Lukan wheezed out as the otter nearly knocked his spine out of alignment.

Klaus released the raccoon with a small chuckle. "I suppose we do! But you know what I mean. Hey, you want to see the fireworks together later?"

Lukan had almost completely forgotten the Fourth of July. He wasn't sure how considering his job reminded him of it day after day throughout June, telling them to feature picnic and grilling related products. And the almost obnoxious patriotic themed cardboard displays that littered the place. "Of course! They'd be a lot more special watching them with you, Klaus!"

"Great! I know this spot along the river where you can see them really, really well! It's in a spot where no one will see us. I love it." The otter's face fell slightly despite the words that came from it. "Platt and I used to go there all the time."

Lukan embraced the otter with a hug this time, one not nearly as tight as the one given to him. "Well, we'll make that our little spot from now on then," he said.

"Y-yeah, I guess we could, huh?" Klaus replied shakily. "Ya know, despite what they were like, I do wonder how Platt, Aero, and even Will are doing nowadays. We haven't seen them in beyond forever. That's a good thing, but I do wonder still."

"I saw Platt the other day at the store, getting on the bus, but that's about it. Other than that, it's been all quiet for me too."

Klaus sighed contentedly. "And that's how it should stay. Good riddance to the drama they caused."

Lukan nodded. "Agreed. Now we can focus on our future together. You still want to leave Lilac Grove with me at some point?"

Klaus shook his head. "As long as I have you, I don't care where on this planet we are. So we could. Or we could stay. As long as we're together."

"That's all that matters in the end." Lukan nodded in agreement.

Sundown was absurdly late at night. Another thing that Lukan hated about the summer was how long the days were and how short the nights were as well. Lukan had always seen himself as a nighttime creature. A lot of raccoons were, he knew, but even so. He eagerly met up with Klaus in the parking lot of his own apartment complex. The raccoon had run late after a confrontation with his mother. Sarah Benka had wanted to go watch the fireworks with him and one of her coworker friends on the mountain. Lukan was more focused on thinking that that particular location would have been another great one for him and Klaus to potentially go to than to focus on arguing with her. He had insisted that he was going with Klaus and had to fight her even more to prevent her from tagging along. Part of the confrontation hurt Lukan. He had never pushed away his mother that much before. He had always been reluctant to do much with her, but this... At least he had a reason to.

"What took ya? The fireworks will be starting any moment now!" Klaus noted as Lukan climbed into his delightfully strong otter smelling truck.

"Mom wanted to take us to the mountains to see the fireworks. Wouldn't leave me alone about it," Lukan muttered.

"This'll be the first time I'm seeing them without my mom, too," Klaus replied somberly. "But. It will be the first we see together. The first of many more than we ever saw with our parents, am I right?"

Lukan laughed. "Absolutely! Let's go!"

The sky slowly darkened as Klaus weaved his way around the roads of Lilac Grove and the western side of the small city that they both lived on. The river that snaked its way through the majority of the north side of the city had many points where roads crossed it. Lukan wondered where along the natural feature that would be so secluded and quiet and still be within the city limits. The more he thought about it, the less it felt it made sense to him. Fireworks were periodically being fired off from various houses around the neighborhoods. This surprised Lukan. Wasn't there a fireworks ban in Lilac Grove due to the unusually dry spring and summer?

Klaus had driven them to the outskirts of the city on the northwestern side. Lukan had very seldom been to that part of town. The roller skating rink was there, and so was a train depot, but not much else. It was right at the city limits, that's all he knew. "Here?" he prompted.

Klaus nodded as he parked his truck along the side of the road. "Yeah. There will be trees shielding us from view while we still get a great one of the sky, where the fireworks will go off!" Lukan took the otter's hand as they jumped over the guard railing that separated the road from the river and nearly fell over on landing. "Don't fall over, silly coonie! I gotcha though!"

Lukan knew if he tried to do that on his own, he would have had a face full of long grass and slid down the slope into the water. "I try." was all he could say in his defense.

Sure enough, up ahead was a small group of trees with low hanging branches just yards off of the riverbank. It did look like the perfect place to have a private natural spot while still being close to town. Klaus sat down on one of the trees' roots and beckoned Lukan to follow, which the raccoon did eagerly. The shaded earth next to the cool water made it an oasis away from the blistering summer heat. It was a perfect place. Lukan wondered for a moment why Klaus never told him about it before, before he remembered that they were together in the winter, where being there would not have been ideal at all. Lukan still held the otter's hand as he sat down. The stars in the sky glittering down at them. The only sounds that could be heard came from the lapping water, crickets chirping, and the occasional boom from fireworks in the distance.

Klaus sighed happily. "This is perfect, you know?"

Lukan looked over and into the otter's eyes. He wished he could see them better in the almost complete darkness. "It really is."

"Oh! They're starting!" Klaus exclaimed as a very large, bright red firework exploded in the sky above them, which was followed closely behind by a blue one.

Lukan nuzzled into Klaus softly while angling his eyes to see the multicolored explosions bursting in the sky. "I never really cared that much about fireworks, but

watching them with the one you love is what makes it special to me now," he whispered.

Klaus turned over and flopped on top of the raccoon, planting a kiss right on the muzzle. "You took the words right out of my mouth!"

Lukan grinned. "So you kiss me to try and take them back?"

"Maybe."

"Silly creature, get back beside me; I can't see the fireworks. Although I do love your eyes more than some silly colored fire in the sky," Lukan giggled, playfully pushing the otter off him.

"You're so adorable," Klaus replied simply as he lied on his back to watch the sky. The otter affectionately laid his tail on Lukan's chest, the attached trinket lay almost on top of Lukan's amulet. Lukan kept his eyes on the color filled sky as it boomed with each new explosion, placing his hands on the otter's tail, stroking it softly. Lukan returned the favor by placing his thick, bushy ringed tail on Klaus, who almost immediately sneezed. "You and this tail of yours," he added. "It's so soft and warm, just like your heart."

Lukan felt himself tearing up from such a sweet and mushy compliment. "That's so gay and mushy it hurts," he said.

"But you love it, don't you?" Klaus rebutted.

"No, I love you and your dorky mushiness. You're the silly one, not me," Lukan countered.

Klaus smirked and placed one of the paws that was stroking Lukan's tail, and moved it between Lukan's legs. Lukan yipped and blushed almost immediately on cue. "Not when you're like this, I'm not!"

"So mean!" Lukan gasped, shifting his legs to make sure he would be able to deny the otter any ability to turn him on then and there.

"You know you love it," Klaus replied slyly, moving his hand right up against the hem of Lukan's pants. Lukan diverted his eyes from the exploding light show to the otter's. Even though many different colors added differing hues to the sparkly emeralds, they did not change the beauty that Lukan saw inside of them. That feeling was rising up Lukan's body again. The desire to have nothing more than the otter around him. The desire to shut out the entire universe and the otter, and him alone, would be allowed in. An internal feeling wanted Lukan to focus on the fireworks, but it was overwhelmingly overruled by his primal desires. Lukan did not even hesitate. He didn't care. He planted the biggest kiss on the otter's lips in the longest time, going in nearly tongue first. The otter returned it almost immediately, greeting raccoon tongue with otter tongue. The pair of lovers pressed each others body firmly against one another as the colorful lights illuminated them. Even when a paw travelled inside of Lukan's tightening pants, Lukan didn't stop. All he could pay any mind to were those

desires. Lukan moaned softly into the kiss, breathing heavily into Klaus' maw as his excitement grew. Klaus giggled as he broke the kiss for a moment. "Someone's getting all excited, isn't he?"

Lukan flushed, obviously bulging. A perfectly timed red firework went off. "Y-you know exactly how to make me so, mean otter! What's with you doing this to me in public so much all of the sudden?" he panted, feigning annoyance.

Klaus shrugged. "Me being bold I guess? I just love my adorable raccoon so much that sometimes I just can't wait to get home!"

"Aww, like I said, you are so gay and mushy," Lukan echoed himself.

"I know!" Klaus said brightly. "Now. Where were we?" Before even letting Lukan answer, Klaus put his tongue in Lukan's maw and his paw in the raccoon's underwear again, resuming the gayness that Lukan had just accused him of. Lukan didn't object. He went along with it eagerly, even allowing the otter to undo his pants and pulling them down. If love was a drug like Klaus seemed to believe that it was, then Lukan was more than happy to be hit hard with its grip. Klaus' grip. Right where Lukan loved it. The fireworks in the sky intensified as it neared its grand finale, but Lukan couldn't be bothered with it. Klaus didn't seem to care about them either. They could only focus on one another. The kiss was broken again, giving Lukan the chance to speak if he wished, but he didn't. The raccoon stayed mute as he usually liked to do. There were no objections. Not even when Klaus' head dipped down, replacing his hand with his muzzle. The sweet sounds that emanated from the raccoon's muzzle as Klaus took him inside his were drowned out by the rapidly increasing explosion rates delivered by more and more fireworks launched simultaneously. Lukan was barely aware of his paw rubbing the back of the otter's head. The only thing in his mind was Klaus. It felt as though that at this moment in time, it was the clearest Lukan's mind had ever become. That the storm that perpetually remained enveloped within it was finally dispersing at long last. Lukan had long awaited this day... And the assurance of the otter's love and affection was all that he needed, just as he believed. Just as he hoped.

The fireworks were going off louder and faster than ever before, obviously reaching their climax, as Lukan rapidly reached his own, sending off his own kind of fireworks for Klaus. Klaus closed his eyes happily and sunk his body right into Lukan's, pressing his warm, slender, short furred self into Lukan's more coarse furred body. Lukan breathed heavily as the fireworks slowed down, wrapping his arms around his lover, never wanting to let go of him ever again.

"Klaus, I love you so much," Lukan whispered after the last explosion echoed in the sky.

"I love you too, Lukan," Klaus' voice was muffled by Lukan's fur. "We missed most of the fireworks."

"I know. I don't care. All I want is you," Lukan replied, holding the otter more tightly around him.

Lukan's fur began to feel wet, and at first, Lukan thought that he had slumped into the river somehow, but figured seconds later that the otter was softly crying into his sides. Tears of joy, Lukan knew. He could feel a few of his own building up inside his sapphire eyes. But those eyes saw something out of the corner of them. Something that made him nearly jump away in fright, potentially hurting Klaus in the process. He had already done once at the pool; he never wanted to hurt Klaus again. But what he saw... It nearly caused him to break that promise. Further down the river, hunched over its waters, was a familiar shape with the same name as the body of water. What was Platt Rivers doing here?