

Twenty-Four. Platt's Regret

"Klaus," Lukan hissed in the otter's ear. Despite Lukan's voice being nothing more than a whisper, it was still hoarse and barely understandable.

Klaus lifted his head from Lukan's stomach, looking confused. "What is it, Lukan?" Klaus asked that question in a voice that was louder than Lukan liked. Thankfully, the figure that belonged to Platt did not hear it.

"Shh!" Lukan practically hissed that out too. "Look over there. What- what is he doing here?"

Klaus shifted his body, looking in the direction that Lukan was pointing. The otter gasped, mouth wide open. Knowing the otter, Lukan instinctively placed his hands over the otter's muzzle, blocking him from screaming out the wolf's name. Klaus struggled with Lukan's arms for a brief moment before prying them off his muzzle. "What the fuck is HE doing out here?!" he breathed, wide eyed.

"I dunno," Lukan replied, watching him. "But keep your voice down! I don't want him to see us here!"

Platt was squatted over the edge of the river. He looked like he was holding something, but he was too far away for either Lukan or Klaus to discern what it was. The wolf held it close to him, whatever the object was, close to his chest for several moments, before setting it down inside the water and pushing it to the center of the river. A small black shape floated there for a few seconds, barely visible in what was left of the light that the sun had to give for that day. It disappeared quickly, either drifting away with the current, or sinking to the bottom of the river. Platt stood there, staring at the flowing water for several seconds before lowering his head, turning tail, and walking back up the slope to where the road was. It was at that moment that Lukan realized that Platt was more than likely going to see Klaus' truck up there if he hadn't seen it already.

"What the hell was that about?" Klaus whispered to the raccoon. Lukan shook his head. "I have no idea at all. What do you think he could have just put in the river? I couldn't tell what it was!"

"I don't either," Klaus admitted.

Lukan stood up, holding Klaus' hand. "Klaus, he's going to see your truck up there! We should go before--!"

"Ahem."

"Fuck!" Lukan breathed.

Platt Rivers stood there, arms crossed, looking at the two of them. His eyes were somber, sullen, dull, and looked as though they were almost out of life. Lukan saw them twitch downward and back up again. Lukan realized with dismay that his

pants were still down, and he pulled them up quickly, muttering another obscenity. "That was more of Lukan than I needed to see." His voice was shaky. Uneven. Something wasn't right with the wolf at all. What had happened? The wolf was always so calm and collected, only losing control when he confronted with what he thought was outrageous enough to warrant his outbursts. But Lukan had never seen the wolf sad before. It was off putting. Strange. Like it was something that couldn't or SHOULDN'T happen. But why? "Why did I just come down here...?" he looked away, sounding like he wasn't able to hold back tears for even a moment longer.

Klaus looked shocked, as if he wasn't sure if he should feel sympathetic or not. Lukan, however, was. "Platt! What's wrong? And what did you put into the river just now?"

"I-it's none of your business!" Platt yelped at Lukan like a wounded dog. Lukan had never heard such a pained sound before. He never wanted to hear it again. "It's Klaus' though. Which is why I want to talk to him. Alone. Please. Go away, Lukan."

Lukan was taken aback by the wolf's words as well as the way he said them. Nevertheless, the raccoon stood his ground. "What you have to say to Klaus, you can say to me, too, Platt. I don't think Klaus is all too keen on helping you anyways, aren't you Klaus?"

Klaus looked as though he no longer knew what to say or do. "Well, I mean, yeah I don't want him or any of the others to mess things up between you and me anymore, but at the same time," Klaus paused. "I don't want anyone to be hurt or sad or anything!"

"I get what you mean Klaus. I want to help Platt too, so that's why I want to st--"

Platt held up a paw to signal for the procyon's silence. "No, raccoon. This is between me and the otter. Not you."

For some foreboding reason, Lukan had a strong feeling that it involved him too in some way that he didn't like. And a dark premonition swept over him that even though Klaus wanted to avoid Platt for the sake of simplifying their relationship, it was going to be inevitable. "Platt, I don't get you," Lukan tried to say. The otter's sigh kept him from continuing.

"It's okay Lukan. I'll just tell you when we meet up again. Alright?" Klaus seemed to resign to whatever fate that Platt was going to lay upon him, whatever it was. This made Lukan trust Platt even less. What if the wolf hurt the otter while Lukan was absent!?

"But-!" Lukan tried to protest, but the otter's paw hit the stop button to Lukan's voice.

"It'll be alright," Klaus said softly. Klaus' confidence that it would only made Lukan even more confused.

"I-" This time Lukan stopped himself, no otter required. He let out a sigh. "Alright. I'll go." Lukan looked at Platt. "I swear to God, if you do something to hurt my otter, you'll be sorry." Even Lukan was surprised that he let out such a warning. Lukan had never said anything like this to anyone before. And it felt even more jarring feeling like, deep down, he meant every word. But without another word, LUKan strut up the slope and towards the road, and stood next to Klaus' car to wait.

Seconds ticked by. Lukan could barely hear their voices speaking to each other down by the riverbanks. Fireworks still occasionally boomed out from various locations surrounding him, temporarily drowning out the creatures' voices. Lukan could not make out a word that was being said by either of them. Seconds blended into minutes. Lukan could not hear either of them talking anymore. It became silent. Almost completely, with depleting fireworks and the flowing river being the only exceptions. No voices though. Lukan started to feel increasingly more worried that Platt did do something to the otter. Did he push the creature into the river? No, there would be splashing. And the otter was a six star swimmer; that would not do anything. Klaus would have screamed if Platt hurt him another way. What did he say to silence a usually not silent creature? It felt like the minutes became hours, but eventually, Klaus came clambering up the slope to meet the raccoon. The wolf was not with him. There was a gaunt look in his eyes. It looked as though Klaus was both drunk and had just seen every ghost in the world combined. His muzzle was open to reflect that shocked look even further. But most of all, that look where Klaus did not know what to do persisted on his face. "Klaus?! What happened?! What did that wolf say to you?!"

"There is no way," Klaus breathed. "But why?"

Lukan ran up to Klaus and softly wrapped his arms around him. "Why what? What's going on Klaus? Tell me!" Lukan could feel both of their hearts beating really hard and really fast at nearly the same pace.

"Platt, he... He said. He said that he..." Klaus struggled to say. "I. I need to talk to Will. Now. As soon as possible. Yesterday!" he exclaimed.

"What?!" Lukan yelled. "Why the fuck would you?!" Lukan couldn't fathom it. Klaus went from wanting nothing to do with Platt or Will to suddenly... What DID that wolf say?! And why wouldn't Klaus give him a straight answer?!

"I need to ask what that fucking snep said to Platt. Now." The otter's shock had almost seamlessly transitioned into anger and rage.

"What Will said to Platt? But what did Platt say to you?!" Lukan exclaimed.

Klaus sighed, took Lukan's arms, and looked at the raccoon right in the eyes. "Platt begged me not to tell you. But he did lie. It does involve you. But he doesn't want it to..." he added, sounding out of breath.

"What? Klaus, please stop trying to avoid it. I-if it involves me, then I am going to find out eventually, aren't I?"

Klaus took a deep sigh. "Alright. Fine. I'll tell you. Platt--" Klaus stopped himself, looking away, as if it pained him too much to speak. Klaus really didn't want Lukan to know! Even after saying that he'd tell him what the wolf said! "Platt said he still loved me. And that he regretted breaking up with me. There. I said it."

For some reason, Lukan felt somewhat relieved it was something relatively simple, but a gut feeling told him it wasn't actually quite that simple. "I-is that all?"

"He said that it was because of something that Will had told him that he suddenly changed his mind, and started feeling regretful for not caring about me or the state of my mind enough to keep me as his boyfriend. A-and..."

Lukan pressed on. "And?"

"And he wants me back," Klaus shuddered out.

"But you... You don't, do you? Do you?" Lukan shakily replied, fearing the answer.

Klaus shook his head. "He should have known better in the first place, but... What the hell did Will say to change his mind like that? Platt's always been this creature that's been impossible to convince of anything!"

Lukan remembered. "That day before Valentine's day. In the park. I told you I saw them breaking up. It might be what Will said to him then!"

"Really... What would that be? Do you remember?" Klaus shook Lukan's body letting the raccoon know that he wanted to know. Or needed to.

"It was Will's thoughts on emotions and all that bullcrap. Platt disagreed with it so much he broke up with Will," Lukan held the mental image of what he'd seen in his head, shaking slightly from Klaus.

"Hypocrite!" Klaus seethed as he released his grip on Lukan. "That's not the Platt that broke up with me in the park! I had thought they gotten together because Platt agreed with Will! Such bullshit!"

Lukan looked at Klaus sadly. "You don't believe me?"

Klaus sighed. "I'll believe anything you say, coonie, but... It's just hard to. Platt broke up with me because I was being too emotional for him. I can't believe that Platt would ever change his mind."

"I don't think he's changed his mind, Klaus. I think now that he's seen what the opposite extreme is like, he's seen what he's done to you, and regrets it. I dunno what specifically he said to you, but maybe he wants to help you," Lukan explained.

Klaus shook his head. "I have all the help I need." He gave Lukan another tight hug. "I don't need him at all anymore."

"That's good Klaus! Um... By any chance, did you find out what Platt put into the river?" Lukan asked.

"I did. It was a bracelet I gave to him. It bore the same symbol as my piercing and your necklace. Although he always wore it as an anklet instead. Saying it was like a

shackle. A shackle that bound him to a life he didn't want. Like you and me, he has a dark story to tell about his past. Life. It just, sucks, you know?" Klaus sadly shook his head.

"I see," Lukan replied softly. "Why would he toss it away like that, I wonder?"

"Why? That he didn't say. Maybe he's let go. Or given up. I really don't know," Klaus said. "I don't think we'll ever know for sure."

"Well, in any case, we'll take on that sucky life together," Lukan vowed, holding Klaus' paw tightly. "No matter who or what comes our way. And we'll win, live happily together, die happily together."

"Of course. Absolutely!" Klaus exclaimed. "One day at a time."

"One day at a time," Lukan echoed.

The days that followed came and went, one day at a time. And each day passed by with the otter by the raccoon's side for each and every one of them for the rest of July. They continued to go to the swimming pool on most of the days that passed. Klaus refused to go ice skating instead, citing that his legs were built for water and not ice. Lukan remembered him saying something along those lines when they first met. Lukan obliged with Klaus, still not liking how the otter's handsome scent was constantly overwritten by abhorrent element number seventeen on the periodic table. The showers they took in an attempt to wash it away remained as blissful as ever. Intimacy was not reached every time due to some creatures deciding to remain last minute some days, but the pair had always made up for that when they got home.

Lukan and Klaus decided a few times to take their trips to the river some days instead as well, when the pool was overpopulated beyond Lukan's comprehension. And Lukan preferred that alone because of the lack of chemicals. For the most part, at least. As time went on, Lukan noticed he was slowly getting better and better at swimming without even trying that hard. It was getting easier for him to catch up to his aquatic boyfriend and Lukan was becoming more and more confident in the water. A few times, Klaus had even dared to get incredibly handsy with Lukan within the waters, either pool or river, throwing Lukan off each and every time. July was such a blissful month, filled with all these memories.

August rolled around, bringing with it even more unbearable summer heat for Lukan and Klaus to enjoy. But Lukan began to notice something about Klaus. Klaus was still as affectionate and loving as ever, but the creature seemed a little more slow about it. Something was bothering him, and Lukan knew it. Was it Platt, or was it something else? Klaus seemed more and more hesitant about leaving Lilac Grove as well. Despite what the otter had said about staying wherever Lukan decided to go, they still held a mutual desire to leave the place they've stayed for many years. But the otter, despite his hatred for Lilac Grove when they first met, no longer seemed so sure

about leaving. He started giving Lukan vague answers, agreeing with him hesitantly, seeming like he no longer wanted to search.

Even midway through the month, Klaus started not seeing Lukan every day. Klaus had said it was because of work. Having worked there for a few months, he said the theater was more comfortable with his performance, boosting the hours he was getting so it kept him from seeing Lukan all the time. Lukan was both happy for him and a little sad that his boyfriend was going to just be working more often. That meant more money for the day they'd leave, he knew. It was a necessary evil. To compensate, Lukan had offered to visit Klaus after work and see movies together. Klaus only obliged sometimes. He had said that if he did that too often, he'd be abusing his "free movie employee incentive".

A particularly hot August 20 crept up on them, threatening to melt the very earth and turn into the lava that was buried in the planet's center. It was so hot outside, Lukan did not want to even go outside for anything. Klaus was worth it, but 105 degrees was borderline fatal for the ring tailed creature. This temperature had to have been a record high for Lilac Grove. Two months had already passed since he and the otter had gotten back together. The otter was at work again and Lukan found himself struggling with a day off with nothing to do until the otter got off later that night. The otter had promised to come and hang out with Lukan at the raccoon's own apartment since it had more competent air conditioning than Klaus' crude and barely functioning house. The place seemed to have been falling apart more and more since the otter's family left. Klaus had no idea how to take care of it as effectively as his family did. Lukan was worried about the state it may end up in once he and his mother were ready to move into it. Then Lukan remembered. He never told his mother about this proposition yet! Lukan cursed the day his absurdly unreliable memory came to be.

He sauntered out of his room as Sarah Benka sat at her computer desk as per usual. "Ugh, why does it have to be so hot?!" he exclaimed. Odd way to start a conversation, but the heat was dominant in his mind just because of how much he despised it.

"It's a record high for Lilac Grove. Beating out the old one which was set back in 1939," Sarah remarked.

"Uuugh!" Lukan groaned as his suspicion was confirmed. He could tell even their usually sufficient enough air conditioning was struggling to keep pace with the fiery air outside. "And creatures in the southwest can deal with 120 plus how?!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Even if most of them are accustomed to it, there is just no way!"

"Beats me. I'd rather deal with the heat than the cold, anyways." Sarah spoke horrible words for Lukan to hear. The raccoon felt he must react accordingly.

"Ew, why!?" Great reaction. Ten out of ten.

"My old bones and joints aren't meant for the cold! When you get older, you'll feel the same way!" Sarah explained defensively.

Lukan only mumbled a retort. "I think anyone who thinks the heat is even remotely okay should be locked up in an insane asylum."

"So how are you and Klaus going? I'm still glad you two did get back together; you're just so adorable with him!" Sarah changed the subject. Lukan was immediately embarrassed.

"N-no I am not!" he cried defiantly. "Actually though, I wanted to talk to you about him."

"For?"

"Well, he's living alone in that house because the rest of his family couldn't afford to and they left. And he's not going to last there for very long, so I suggested we move in to help him?" Lukan was oddly nervous when he brought up the idea to Sarah.

"But we can't just leave here until November, you know that right?" Her voice was somewhat hard, as if she thought Lukan didn't already know this.

"Yeah, I know. He says he can last until then, but I'm not so sure. He got a boost in hours where he works, but that can only help him so much for so long," Lukan explained.

"Well, when November comes I don't think it'd be terrible to move in with him. What about when his lease ends? Maybe he could move in with us instead?"

"I thought about that, but I remembered that our landlord might not allow that," Lukan scratched his head.

"Only midway through the lease. When it's time to renew it or create a new one, sure, it can work then," Sarah replied.

"He didn't tell me when it would end actually," Lukan said, realizing this fact. "For some reason I thought he did."

"Well, find out next time you see him, Lukey." Still calling him Lukey. "Didn't you say that Klaus would be coming later? Do it then!"

Lukan wanted to sigh in disdain over that. Nevertheless, he agreed to his mother's offer and returned to his room, awaiting the hour when Klaus would get off. At least by then, night will have fallen and the temperatures would follow suit, even by just a little bit. Although even at night in Lilac Grove, the temperatures still stayed over 70 degrees, despite the thinner and drier air around Lilac Grove and it infuriated Lukan greatly. Lukan always found himself in constant moody moments throughout the summer months that he thanked his lucky stars Klaus and the relationship he had with him helped suppress it, even not perfectly. Klaus' mere presence helped Lukan forget about the majority of the qualms in his head. But when Lukan was alone, such things were all he could think about. Would the otter survive on his own? What was Will up to? Where was Aero? The when, where, and hows of moving out of Lilac Grove. They all

swarmed in Lukan's head like buzzing insects until the pesticide that was Klaus' presence came to purge them.

The sun went down, and Lukan's room grew slowly darker as the sun disappeared over the horizon to bathe a different part of the planet within its light and overbearing heat. The otter would be off any moment, Lukan observed. He wondered when. Lukan's bedroom faced the wrong way, in the opposite direction from where the otter would approach, so he couldn't run and check if he was there like he always did with Sarah as a cub. It was an agonizing wait. It seemed to last forever. Lukan ignited the artificial light to flare up in his room as twilight's last glimmers of daylight began to die off. But still the otter did not come. Dare Lukan check the time to see how late the otter had potentially become? Qualms stacked on each other as Lukan sat alone, wondering. What happened? Did something happen? Was the otter forced to stay late against his wishes? Did he forget? No. How could he otter ever forget about Lukan and meeting up with him? Or worse, was there an incident where the creature got hurt? Lukan shook his head. He absolutely refused to contemplate such a possibility. It would break his heart too much, and it was only just glued back together!

"Lukey, I'm heading to bed. Are you sure Klaus is coming tonight?" Sarah's voice made Lukan nearly jump out of his fur in surprise.

"U-uh, okay," he replied unsteadily. "He said he'd come, but... It's already late. I dunno if he will now," he added sadly. He really had hoped this wouldn't be the case. Lukan knew the longer he stayed alone, the more his thoughts attempted to usurp his newly tranquil mind. He did not want that. It was the last thing he wanted to go through again.

"Well if he does show up, just know to keep it down," Sarah said softly before disappearing into her room, shutting the door quietly.

Lukan only nodded, even though she wasn't going to see it. Lukan glanced at his computer, which was on its screensaver: The otter himself smiling and waving. Lukan was tempted to throw an email in the mustelid's direction to see what was going on, as it was definitely later than Lukan liked. Klaus had always shown up before Sarah went to bed before. This time seemed different. Lukan sighed as he stepped towards his computer. He stopped himself halfway to the machine. Lukan began to think as he always did, especially when alone. Would the otter even answer him let alone give him an explanation? The creature had been unusually evasive since they saw Platt on the Fourth of July. Lukan began to wonder more and more again just what that silver wolf had said to Klaus and why he didn't want Lukan to know. Klaus refused to tell him. Klaus had promised to tell him. All Lukan knew was that it had something to do with Will and the fact that Platt wanted Klaus back. What did this mean? Lukan sighed as he noticed time drifting into August 21. There was no way the otter was coming now. He sadly slumped into his bed to try and sleep, knowing how impossible that'd be with all

the thoughts in his head and without an otter's warm, comforting body against his own. Lukan only hoped that he wasn't going to lose his otter again so soon after everything that's happened, but despite hoping, Lukan felt said hope drifting further and further, faster than his mind could drift to sleep.