

Thirty-One. Impossible Decision.

Lukan was almost entirely devoid of emotion throughout his day of work that day. But Lukan was glad for that fact. The raccoon had felt nothing short of every negative emotion conceivable ever since the otter had betrayed him in such a way. It was at the point where Lukan would be happier if he was no longer able to feel anything at all. This was despite the fact that such a concept would defy logic. Though, what was the point of feeling anything, if such overwhelming sadness and anger would be the only things present? Did Will have a point? Was that snow leopard right all along? The raccoon began to feel momentary desire to consult the snow leopard that he had also previously wished to cast from his life. And such desires only filled him with confusion. He wanted to ignore Will. He wanted to pretend that he and the otter did not exist. Or at least, he used to. But the more the raccoon thought about how he felt, the more he felt contrary. The more he wanted to find the answers from both of them.

Lukan let out a deep sigh as he clocked out for the night. It was a recurring action that he did. A lot more often these days, much more than before he met the otter. Lukan passed by all his familiar coworkers as he left, feeling envy for something they might not even have. He looked around at the entrance, realizing momentarily that the otter was probably somewhere nearby, though the specifics of where exactly were unknown to him. Once again, he had failed to specify where exactly the rendezvous should be. The creature was not at where he had often ambushed him by the center back door as. The entrance? Maybe, but which one? Lukan shook his head as he directed his body to become encompassed by the frigid outdoor air. Lukan knew his luck was going to be as such; it always was!

Lukan searched for several moments, pacing back and forth in front of the store as well as inside of it before deciding to call the search quits. On top of his aching paws, he was worried he was bound to be looking suspicious being a raccoon and all, despite many of the employees knowing he worked there. The raccoon decided the following best course of action was to wait in the area he saw the otter's truck. He did not know which one of the nearby houses the forbidden lovers hid themselves away at, but he knew he was going to find out.

It was a slow, quiet walk over to the neighborhood that split Lukan's home from work and also held both the park as well as Platt and Klaus. The cooler temperatures outside that normally kept Lukan's emotions at bay simply did not that evening. The raccoon was too focused to be able to let that happen. The raccoon even kept his eyes firmly averted away from the traffic that passed by or crossed his path instead of glaring at them softly as he usually did. Upon reaching the street that they lived on, he

sighed in relief when he noticed the truck was not there. Perhaps they were still looking for him at the store, he assumed. Oh well. They were going to give up eventually. Lukan stood at the corner of the intersection, pacing in order to keep his paws moving. When Lukan stood still for too long, they ached relentlessly and agonizingly. That evening was no different; the raccoon found himself frequently switching which leg to put his weight on just to give one a momentary reprieve. This of course, fueled Lukan's already powerful impatience. The raccoon had no means of telling the time, so he had no idea how long he was destined to wait. How patient was the wolf and the otter in searching for him? The only certainty Lukan could discern from such a question was that it was most certainly more than any patience Lukan feels he has. If he has any at all, that is.

Lukan was tempted to just go home and reschedule the meeting, but as he took a step away from the intersection, he saw a pair of headlights shining from a perpendicular road, turning towards him. They were dim, a lot like the ones on the otter's truck. He knew it had to be him. The yellow truck stopped, its tires screeching briefly in protest when its driver realized who was standing just there.

"You blasted coon! I thought we said the store!" came the sound of the otter's voice from inside. It was shouting, but its volume was hindered by the sound of his engine. "We were looking for you forever!"

Lukan figured as much. "Yeah, I was too, but for a change, I could not find you!" he shouted right back. Platt sat in the passenger side, looking down at him with a blank and unreadable expression, just as he always had.

"How did you know we lived over here?" the silver wolf asked him curiously.

"I know what Klaus' truck looks like," Lukan answered coolly, the tone being involuntary. "I dunno which house you two fuck in, though."

"There is no need for such a tone, raccoon," Platt retorted spicily.

"I think there is considering what you have done, wolf," Lukan spat back, clenching his fists. Lukan had no intention of getting angry. So why was he?!

Luckily, the otter shut it down before it could get started. "Calm down you two; we're here to talk. Not argue, okay? See you at the house Lukan in a moment." And without letting Lukan and Platt respond, the otter turned down the street Lukan saw the trucked parked down the previous day, and watched it park half way down and the two passengers of it exiting. They both faced him. Lukan took a deep breath before taking slow, but large strides back down the street. He knew he had to control his emotions if things were going to go well at all. Was this how Klaus had been feeling all this time? No wonder it was so hard for him.

Lukan looked between the wolf and the otter, unsure of what to say. He was worried if he said anything, he would just explode in both of their faces, rendering the situation ugly instantaneously. He could tell by the looks on their faces that they were

just as uncertain as he was. But eventually, it was Klaus who decided to break in immeasurable awkward silence. "So uh... I take it that you still won't accept my apology, Lukan?" And from the look in the emerald eyes in the otter's face, Lukan could tell that this statement was not exactly what Klaus had intended to say.

Lukan sighed, looking down at his own tired, complaining paws. "No, Klaus. I don't think I could ever forgive you for what you've done. Ever. But... Maybe if you just tell me why, it might help. Why did you do that to me? Just why?"

Klaus sighed this time. "I'm not sure what Reali managed to tell you, but I told her to tell you that it was because, well, Platt and I had been together for such a long time, and I came up here to Lilac Grove just for him." Klaus paused as Lukan began to think. Lukan remembered the female otter mentioning that, but was far too disgusted at her trying to defend Klaus' abhorrent actions to let it sink in. Klaus continued. "So when Platt said that he still had a lot of feelings for me, I just... I did not know what to do!"

"Klaus--" Lukan let one of his own sighs interrupt him. "There was an obvious right thing to do. And that was to talk to me about it. I-I dunno what I would have done then, but..."

"Exactly! What was I supposed to do?!" Klaus exclaimed. "If we talked about it I mean. No matter who I would have chosen, one of you was going to be hurt in the end-- I just. I just can't handle the idea of either one of you being in any pain!"

"So cheating on me was not going to put me in any pain, huh? Yeah right, you infidel rudderbutt." No. Lukan couldn't let himself become too angry. Stop it you stupid creature!

"Lukan, neither of us had the intent of hurting you," Platt responded.

"I just can't believe that. If that were true, then we would NOT have to have this conversation right now, Klaus would be living with me right now, and everything would be just fine!" Lukan exclaimed.

"I wouldn't be fine," Platt replied, almost in a whisper.

"One of you wouldn't be. That's why that decision hurt me so bad to make, Lukan. It was just impossible to keep you both from being unhappy!"

"So the only reason you chose Platt over me was because of your history with him?" Lukan replied, feeling enormous amounts of air leaving his lungs with each word.

Klaus dipped his head. "I'm sorry."

Lukan flicked his tail in anger. "Well apology unaccepted. I can't believe you were willing to hurt me so badly."

"You know Platt would have said the same thing if I had chosen you instead. There was just no way I was going to win in the end," Klaus said quietly to contrast Lukan's increasing volume. "I knew someone was going to be mad at me no matter what I did. At the end of the day, every decision was the wrong decision. I-it's like I said

way back when! No matter what decision is to be made, someone is gonna be hurt in the end! There is no true right way!"

Something about what Klaus ended that statement with resonated with Lukan for a moment. A small, brief moment. A miniscule amount of understanding hit Lukan. And Lukan barely had any inkling as to where it came from. "I get it, Klaus. I do. But at the very least we should have just talked about it. Maybe there was something we could have done. Ya know. Maybe all three of us could have gone poly." Lukan was taken aback by that outlandish suggestion. He was not even aware of such a concept floating inside his mind until it flew out of his mouth to make itself known. Polygamy? No way. That just did not feel right to him considering the standard was a one on one. It did not feel normal. But at the same time...

"No. Just. No." Platt replied adamantly. "No way do I want two boyfriends only to find out they prefer each other over me. No way in HELL I am taking that risk."

"It just doesn't feel right at all," Klaus echoed Lukan's mind. "I really don't think I could try that."

Lukan sighed. "I mean, I feel the same way but... At least nobody would have to have their heart broken. I dunno. Maybe it would mean more love to go around."

"Or have it split and be weakened," Platt scoffed. "Poly relationships only work if everyone involved is just as engaged with it as the others. And I definitely would not be."

Lukan was breathing smoke at Platt's words. "So you thought it would be better just to take Klaus away from me then?! You're so fucking heartless! You could at least give it a try!"

Platt said nothing and kept his gaze away from both Lukan and Klaus. Klaus was the one who spoke next instead. "I-I'm sorry, Lukan, but... I just don't see it working either."

"So you won't try to give it a shot then? I mean try and think about it." Lukan was now wondering why on EARTH he was trying to get with the guys who murdered his heart so cruelly and without any regards to him. Was it...

Klaus shook his head. "No Lukan. I'm sorry."

"So why the fuck are we talking then?! I try to find a compromise, as we should have done instead of deciding to have me be cheated on! Your refusal to even TRY is proof enough that you don't give a damn about me at all!" Lukan shouted.

"Enough. The neighbors are going to hear us. It's Halloween night, or have you forgotten?" Platt growled.

"Lukan, that's not true! I care so much about you; that's why I wanted to talk! So you can understand why I did what I did, and just how damn hard it was for me to do it!" Klaus cried. The otter looked like he was on the verge of tears, but Lukan failed to care about this at all. If they weren't going to try and care, why should he?

"Bullshit!" Lukan nearly threw his fist into Klaus' face. "If you cared at all..." He couldn't go on. He knew where his words were going to go. They were going to go down a road already travelled. Instead, the raccoon turned tail and started to stomp away. "Fuck you both. You two deserve each other. Have fun fucking and loving each other knowing what you had to do to make it happen."

"Lukan..." he heard Klaus say as he walked away. The otter's voice sounded weak and defeated, like he did not know what to say or do anymore. The otter did not say anything else. Lukan could tell Klaus was watching him walk away. All Lukan wanted was for them to fully understand the impacts of their actions. But Lukan had the feeling that they were never going to. Not truly. And that was precisely why the raccoon wanted to leave them and Lilac Grove as a whole behind forever.

As Lukan walked, he watched as creatures that lived in the neighborhood took their cubs out for the evening for the annual door to door collection of candy every final day of the tenth month. Lukan couldn't imagine what would have possibly happened if the argument had happened moments later than it did. Or... Was everyone avoiding them because they knew something less than idea was going down? Lukan despised the thought of his life becoming even remotely publicized and known to those that weren't directly involved. It was the core reason he refrained from giving any of his coworkers or even his own mother any details whatsoever. All Lukan could do now was to focus on his mission. His one true desire. What he wished for. What he had that was taken away from him.

Lukan and his mother failed to talk to each other very much for the entire night, when the young raccoon returned home. Lukan won his bet that there would be no trick-or-treaters that night. Not a single creature showed up. Good thing too, in the raccoon's mind; he didn't even bother getting into costume of any kind to take part in the celebration. There was simply nothing TO celebrate anymore. Lukan made that vow over and over and over again that someday that will once again change. It was all he could think about, the only thing he cared for.

Sarah and himself carried on discussing their future move to the desert inhabited southwest with the days that followed. November appeared, disguising itself as a bitterly cold, windy, and snowy December, giving Lukan the false pretension that departure was closer than it actually was. But of course, such a thing was too good to be true.

"We need to figure out exactly where we are going to end up going once we get down there, you know. We can't exactly show up in town without any sort of plan. We don't know anybody down there at all!" Sarah brought up on one particularly blustery November morning. Both she and Lukan were off that day, which was as about as rare as anything could possibly get.

Lukan knew that this was only halfway true. Fidel Skison, the friend of his that Lukan was trying to talk to more and more, was the only one he knew, but only from an online presence. Suddenly Lukan started to question the validity of his motives. Was he really planning to leave a town that he practically grew up in for the sake of meeting someone he only knew online? No, there was also the escaping from Klaus, Platt, and by extension, Will too. But was all that worth it? No. It had to be. If Lukan was going to have any chance, even a tiny one, to reclaim his losses, Lilac Grove simply had to be abandoned. There could not be any allowance for hesitation.

"That's true. I think we should look at a bunch of places around the--" In that moment, Lukan realized the sheer volume of subcommunities and suburbs that outlined and surrounded the larger area of Salamander itself, just as would be the case of any large metropolitan city. Lukan wasn't used to such a thing, growing up in places under a hundred thousand others. Which one of these places was Fidel located in?

"Where?" Sarah replied to get Lukan to finish his sentence.

Lukan stared at the map, wondering what to say. "So many places..." Excellent thing to say. Some things never change...

"Big cities." Sarah scoffed. "I really don't want to go to another one again."

"Well then, maybe not Salamander proper then," Lukan replied. "I'm sure one of the suburbs will be good still."

"I guess." The mother raccoon seemed unconvinced as she scowled at the map on her computer screen, making the mask of her face look stretched. Lukan was about let his mind go on a tangent, but the mother coon continued to speak. "Are you really sure about this, Lukan? Why do you want to get out of Lilac Grove? Why Salamander? Is there something going on?"

Lukan jumped, feeling worry creep up his spine. He knew no matter what, Sarah Benka was to remain in the dark of what was really happening. He couldn't bear the thought of her potential reaction to all that has transpired in the previous month. "No, nothing is going on. You know I have not like Lilac Grove for a long time, right?"

She still seemed skeptical. "Well, yeah, but I never heard you outright wanting to leave. And why move to the desert with your aversion to the heat? It doesn't make much sense to me, is all."

Lukan shrugged, unsure of what to say. "I remember you talking about moving there because it would never be cold there, so I thought..."

"I also can't see you wanting to move there on my behalf. You don't even acknowledge Mother's Day, you know!" Ouch. The mother raccoon grilling into Lukan for that hurt surprisingly.

"W-well, I uh--!" And Lukan was flustering just as he did with creatures he first meets with his own mother. And yet, this failed to surprise him. "I knew that picking somewhere was going to be hard, so I just decided, ya know what?! Screw it. Let's go,

here!" Lukan pointed at the screen, at a southwest suburb of Salamander called Sun Plateau.

"Sun Plateau? Is that where?" Lukan's mother looked at her son.

"U-uhh..." Lukan was stuck again. Considering what he had just said, he knew he should say yes to avoid self contradiction. But, he still did not know where Fidel lived yet, so he could not do that. "I mean, I guess so..." Nice.

"Lukan, you know that we can't just go anywhere." Sarah said with a sigh, dropping her act immediately. "We need to know how the place is, how expensive, what the weather is like, the crime rates, all that jazz. It's really important, you know!"

Lukan sighed. "Yeah, I know that."

"And nowhere in Salamander looks any good on all these topics, you know. I dunno if it's the right place or not."

And that statement sent worry spiraling into his tail so fast, Lukan could feel it like lightning. He could not allow this to happen. He would not allow this to happen! "There has to be somewhere! A-and if not, then we'll have to deal with one or the other. Nowhere is perfect, or can ever be perfect!"

"Hmm..." Sarah seemed to put on her thinking cap. Lukan wasn't sure. She could be just trying to dismiss Lukan's plea.

"Think about it. Low priced places usually have crime, or something really wrong with the city, otherwise creatures would be keen on living there. You can't really win easily there. As far as I know, Lilac Grove at least was cheaper because it's a town full of nothing but really bad weather."

Sarah sighed and turned to her computer, looking just about as unsure as Lukan usually did. It was like they had swapped personalities for that moment. "I'll just keep searching around, Lukey."

Lukan walked back to his room after the somewhat disastrous meeting with his mother, hoping to reignite a different conversation, this time with a certain coyote he liked. Mostly so he could find out where the creature lived and pinpoint it. And hopefully... convince his mother to get them there. This was going to be much more difficult than he had imagined.

The coyote wasn't online; Lukan's most recent message was left unread, but that did not deter Lukan from composing a new one, with the golden question plastered all over it. And Lukan was even less deterred to find himself impatiently waiting for the coyote to respond to him. Lukan checked his messages every half a minute, being too distracted to do anything else on his computer. In fact, when Lukan did receive a response, nearly an hour later, his hand practically jerked over to his messages to see it as soon as possible.

'Where I live in Salamander? Oh, I suppose that would be good to know. I live in Sun Plateau. Pretty nice place if you know where to go. My advice is stay away from the northeast side of the place, the part closest to the big city. It's complete shit up there. I live in the center of it myself.

Man... I still cannot believe that that otter did all that to you. Do you really think he means what he says about how bad he feels? I mean... he just doesn't sound at all that alright of a guy to even be friends with you know?'

Lukan felt himself jumping slightly in his seat upon reading the location of the coyote. It made sense to him that such a coincidence would happen, but it made no sense that such a coincidence would be of the benign. Was this a tiny sign of approval from life itself? No. That would simply be too good to be true and outrageously outlandish. Lukan replied with the fact that he and his mother were feverishly doing their research and fundraising for the big move in the coming month. Still, four months remained before departure. Time could not move fast enough.

As Lukan began to walk towards bed, feeling far too tired to do much of anything else for the remainder of the day, especially once he had pinpointed his target, the raccoon began to replay the argument he and Klaus and Platt had on Halloween night. He began to think of what he would have done if he were in Klaus' situation. It was obvious that he would have talked with his boyfriend first and foremost, but depending what they'd say... It was just as Klaus had said then. Then what? Especially if he had disagreed to make any sort of compromise... Lukan slammed a fist down onto his bed. No. Someone unwilling to compromise would not be anyone worth having in his life at all! And that otter... Fits that description to a T. So does Platt. So does Will. It disgusted Lukan. And reminded him as to why he was ever a misanthropist in the first place. Creatures like Klaus were destined to just betray him one day. The raccoon began to wonder what made him think otherwise. What made him try at all. But that answer was just as clear to him as his goals were. The very concept of love itself. But if other creatures were destined to let him down, then... Was it worth chasing after, after all?

Lukan closed his eyes, beginning to drift off to sleep. The very idea of heartbreak and heartache simply hurt too much for him to answer in any other way.

