

Klaus

“What about Klaus?” I asked.

“Oh, not for you.” Sandy laughed.

“Why not?”

“He’s kind of a badass. Huge prey drive...he’d eat your kitties. Besides, he’s in doggie rehab.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means he’s started biting. So he’s in training with one of our volunteers.”

When I met him in person, he took my breath away. He has that effect on everyone. Klaus is a stunning, regal archetype for the German shepherd breed. One hundred pounds of muscle and sinew and thick bone cloaked in luxuriant cream, bronze, and black fur. His eyes—wild and wolf-like—command passersby to stop in their tracks.

Klaus is aloof. Like a gorgeous bachelor in a sea of desperate women, he knows that everyone wants him but that few are his equal. He plays it cool at the adoption events, observing transactions with detached air. Unless someone he takes offense to approaches his crate. Then he explodes. Like a police dog in full attack mode—settling only when his target has slunk respectfully away.

He'd been with Coastal for months while they searched for an appropriate match for him. Someone who understands how to be alpha without crushing his beautiful spirit. Someone he can look up to, respect, and protect. But as the weeks passed, no match was found.

Caron, one of Coastal's lead people, asked me one day, "Will you get into his head and figure him out?"

"I can try," I replied. I quieted myself and closed my eyes. I visualized Klaus and then I connected.

"Klaus, what's up with the biting?"

I've pretty much always been this way.

"It's not new?"

No.

"Is it why your people relinquished you?"

One of the reasons.

"Biting isn't appropriate."

I don't care.

"It hurts, Klaus."

I didn't know that.

"Were you abused?"

Yes.

"I'm sorry."

The frequency of it astonished me.

"There is much ignorance in the human race."

It is to be expected.

“It needs to change. The abuse...is that why you bite?”

One of the reasons.

“What other reasons?”

It's just so tempting.

I understood what he meant. Biting was a visceral, primal experience for him. The faint tickle of body hair. The spongy feel of the flesh giving way to meaty, taut muscle. All reminding him of his natural urge to hunt. It was simply his nature.

“If you want to live with in harmony with people, you have to stop biting,” I said.

I don't care if I live with people.

“What *do* you want?”

I've pretty much had it.

“With what?”

Life. Domestication. I want to be free.

This all seemed so extreme. Was this dog telling me he was done? That he'd given up? That because he'd been abused he was unwilling to trust?

Then I doubted my intuition. What if I had heard him wrong? What if I'd misunderstood? I reported back to Caron with a caveat: “Grain of salt with all this.... I could be wrong.”

One day, Klaus was adopted. And it seemed a good match. He went with strict instructions to the new people about what not to do. And we held our breath, willing this to work. Well, I didn't hold my breath. I knew it wouldn't work. His new people took

him to a pet store and then let him off the leash at a dog park. Neither experience had gone well. Klaus was returned within a week.

I watched him go through his paces at event after event. Once, I caught him staring at me. Fixing me with his wild, golden eyes.

I remember you, he said.

“And I you,” I replied.

You talked to me.

“Yes.”

I like you.

“I’m honored.”

At the adoption events, Klaus was tucked into the background in his crate to protect him and everyone else. But people are drawn to him and seek him out anyway. His wildness is a beacon for the weak or simply those cut from the same cloth. He makes it clear who’s allowed near and who isn’t. It’s almost comical. Especially since no one was ever hurt.

He shuttled back and forth between two fosters: Tess, our leader, and Mike, another volunteer. They are the only two people Klaus likes. I’ll never forget the day he went off on me. Tess had asked me to come with her to her SUV to get some meds for one of our dogs. Klaus was inside the vehicle perched in the back seat. She opened the driver’s side door. Klaus spotted me and exploded. I flinched, and even though a pane of glass separated us, my heart pounded.

“Car alarm’s working,” Mike quipped from a few feet away.

“You tell him I’m crushed,” I replied. “Never mind. I’ll tell him.”

I was surprised he'd reacted so strongly since we'd connected. But he was just defending his territory.

Weeks later, my daughter and I arrived at an adoption event that was already underway. As we approached, we could hear one dog above the others, barking incessantly in a deep, resonant baritone.

"Guess who that is," I said.

"Klaus," she correctly guessed.

"Klaus, Klaus, Klaus," I admonished, shaking my head in amusement. "Not the way to get adopted, bud."

But Klaus didn't care if he got adopted. He's wild and wants to be free.

One night I had a vision of him running free in a forest. His bushy blond hindquarters pumped powerfully as he jogged away to explore his new territory. He looked more like a wolf than a dog.

The next morning, I had an epiphany. There was a wolf preserve nearby. What if I could pay for Klaus to go there? What if I could set him free?

I reached out to the wolf preserve and explained his plight. I inquired about whether they could take him to see if he could integrate with the other wolves. Their response was no. They wouldn't take him. They couldn't see my vision for him. And even if they had agreed, Coastal probably would have thought I was nuts.

I broke down and cried even though I know everything happens for a reason. If the answer was no, then it wasn't meant to be. And I had to accept that while Klaus might be wild at heart, he was *not* wild by nature. Perhaps the wolves would have welcomed him—as a meal. Which wouldn't have been in his best interests. I had considered that

possibility when I reached out to the wolf preserve. That the wolves might kill him rather than coexist. I think he would have found honor in that—a warrior's death. But that isn't his destiny, so it isn't how his story played out.

Charles Lindberg once said that true freedom lies in wildness, not in civilization. Perhaps that is why Klaus remains wild at heart. Without this, the abuse of his past might have crushed him. Instead, he rises up, hearkening back to a more primal existence where life and death play out in a simple drama. He is a bold reminder that within each of us exists a spark that urges us to explore uncharted paths, to forge into unconquered territory, and to achieve our wildest dreams. A determined dichotomy of domestic and wild, Klaus reminds us that to integrate all parts of the self—wild and domestic—is to become whole.

Perhaps the vision I saw of him running wild in a forest was a premonition of something yet to come. Perhaps somewhere, there would be a home with acres of land where Klaus could integrate his heart's desire and run free.

A few months later, Tess and Mike adopted Klaus. He lives with a pack of shepherds in the country on an acre of fenced land. It was the perfect ending to his story, and I, in particular, am eternally grateful that dreams can come true. Especially for our beautiful, wild Klaus.