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WARNING: May contain coarse language, violence, gore or sexual content. Reader discretion is advised.

Chapter 13. "I Love You"

Shari composed herself and sat back across from him. She sighed deeply and appeared to relax. It was quiet for a few minutes as they drank their tea. He perked up.

"Dinner was delicious," he said and smiled. "All your food had been very delicious. Is that something you enjoy doing?"

Shari smiled and closed her eyes as her muzzle swayed back and forth.

"I fed you burnt fish and pot roast, eggs so hard you could break a window with them, and pork strips so dry you finished off two tankards of water and you think my food is delicious," she said and snickered. She smiled wider and opened her eyes. "I'll admit that the roast tonight was exceptional, but I shudder to think what you've put in your mouth over the years to think any of the other things have been even close to being called 'delicious'. And while I'm glad the food didn't go to waste, I feel bad that you've willingly eaten it and that I willingly allowed you to eat it. I really should be ashamed of the treatment of my guest."

He shook his head. "No. Not at all. If I am staying here without payment, I should be treated as such."

Shari looked at him as if she were getting angry. "Vilkas...you," she began. Her expression calmed from anger to irritation as she appeared to be thinking. "Vilkas," she said and her expression softened. "Don't think like that. I know..."

Shari seemed like she was struggling to find the words to say. She sighed and closed her eyes, her head drooped. She tapped her cup with her claws and bit her lip. She softly sighed and tapped her cup with all of her claws. She opened her eyes and her expression looked resolute.

"I know I've said before that our first impressions of each other were less than ideal. But," she said and looked up at him. "Know that you are welcome under this roof. I appreciate and hope you continue to help around when and where you are able. That goes for the future, too. If you find yourself on hard times and need a meal or you have an argument with your significant other and you've nowhere else to turn, you are still welcome in my home. I will treat you to a drink or a meal and we can talk it over until you feel you can hold your head up and leave with a solution and a smile. To hear you talk like that makes me angry."

He looked at her intently and slightly tilted his head to the right.

"I'm angry because that's how your life ingrained hospitality into your head. Life isn't about money. It helps, believe me. But you can have a bag of coins in your hands and tears in your eyes without friends and happiness. Your saving this village from further harm, your help with chores and your friendship is more than enough payment for services rendered. I know that I said you still owe me, but I think I'm clearing that from your conscious. You owe me nothing."

She leaned in and her expression turned serious, but it held a certain kindness to it. It reminded him of when his mother would scold him.

"I'm finding that I'm not just helping you." Her expression softened to her usual kindness. "You're helping me, too." She sat upright again. "Your being here has helped me realize that I've grown lax in some areas. You're helping me in ways you don't realize. I feel I'm putting extra effort into deciding, shopping for, preparing and cooking food. I feel I'm putting extra effort into making sure this place is clean. I've even put a lot more effort into my practice."

She went silent. She glanced down at her cup and tapped it with her claws again.

"You're helping me get over my fear of men," she said and chewed at the inside of her mouth. "I've even...been...finding myself...doing," she was saying with hesitation. "Or acting," she said and briefly raised her eyebrows. "Certain ways...that...I haven't in a long time...or...ever." She said those words as if they caused her pain.

He pressed his lips together and thought of how to reply to that. It took him a minute, but he figured out something that might be okay to say.

"Isn't that the same for me?" He asked, looking at her kindly.

She looked up at him with a blank expression.

"I mean, I've been trained to fear everyone. I've never learned anyone's name or face. I don't even remember the places I've been. I've never felt 'love' or 'loved'. Not even 'liked' someone. But I came here...wishing to die...and the first person I can say I remember what they look like and what they're called is Socorro. The second is you. And Seppo. Alida. Nir. Tangi. Valeska."

Her expression slowly became brighter. She began to smile.

"You're helping me get over my fear of people. How to act properly. I've spoken more words to you in this day than my entire life *combined*. My tongue dries out. I've only smiled in rage. My face hurts when I smile around you. I feel things other than anger and rage and nothingness." He paused long enough to take a drink. "I said I came here to die. That hasn't changed. You've helped me realize I want to live longer than I had planned. And I hope you'll be my friend until that day comes."

Her smile was as big as it could get without showing her teeth.

"You've grown so much today," she said and clasped her hands together on the table in front of her cup. "You said just about the same thing earlier, but the way you said it just now is so much more palatable. It doesn't make me afraid of you. It makes me want to help you even more."

They stared at each other for a moment. He didn't notice it at first, but he was smiling back at her.

"I do enjoy cooking. It makes it even more enjoyable when I don't have to portion everything out for one. I enjoy baking, too. I'll make you cookies tomorrow. I enjoy running. I enjoy chopping wood. I enjoy lifting and moving objects to keep my physique because it does make my job easier. I enjoy healing people. I enjoy listening to people and helping with their problems. I enjoy shooting a bow. I think I'd enjoy learning to wield my dagger better. I enjoy crafting with Seppo and the women of the village. I enjoy traveling to other cities. I enjoy the theatre in the big city and even the holiday plays the village children put on every year. I enjoy..." Shari paused and looked at him with concern. "Vilkas, are you alright?"

He felt like his brain was going to explode. He could feel intense pressure in his head and chest. His head pulsed behind his right eye and lip was twitching. Despite that, he couldn't stop his tail from wagging.

Shari leaned to her left. She straightened up and covered her mouth with her hand as she laughed into it.

"I can't read or write but I feel I should have been writing all that down," he blurted, his voice sounding strained.

"You wag your tail, too," she said and covered her mouth with both hands as she laughed into her palms. "Y-you-hoo looked la-hike...your he-head was about to e-hex-plode, but...your tail," she said and bent forward, laughing uncontrollably into her hands.

"I don't understand!" He cried. His face began to hurt from smiling. His butt started to ache from wagging so hard. His face burned and his heart was racing.

He watched as Shari would gain composure only to lose herself in laughter again. Tears began to well up and stream down her cheeks. Her glasses began to fog up. She began slapping the table.

"My stomach," she cried as she brought her hands to her waist. "It hurts."

She burst into laughter. Her face showed both joy and pain. He glanced at his stubby tail waving back and forth in a blur. He looked back at her and felt his stomach tremble.

"Heh-heh," he chuckled. He felt his lips curl back into a massive grin. "Ha ha ha," he began to laugh and stopped, surprised by the sound he was making.

Shari abruptly stopped laughing and stared at him through watery eyes and foggy glasses in surprise. "Your laugh," she said and chuckled. "I love it," she said. Her lips curled up so all her teeth were showing and her expression turned back into joy. "But not as much as that look on your face just now," she said and laughed.

She was laughing so hard and loud it began to echo against the walls. She clenched her eyes closed and slapped the table. She stopped breathing and just convulsed upon the table top.

"*Ssnerk!*" Shari snorted through her nose. She again stopped laughing and looked at him in shock. "Did...I just...snort?" She asked him. She looked mortified and glanced around as if trying to blame it on something else...or perhaps an escape route.

"You did," he said and began to laugh. "And the look on your face just now," he said and began to laugh loud and hard.

Shari chuckled. Then she began to laugh again, matching his intensity.

"I hate you," she said after gasping, then continued laughing to the extent of her breath. "*Snerk. Snerk*," she snorted again and continued laughing.

They continued laughing at each other and themselves long enough for the sun to leave and darken the room. They were both doubled over the table clutching their stomachs. They looked at each other as they panted with heads upon the table.

"I really enjoyed that," he said between breaths.

"Me too," she said between her own breaths. "Your laugh is loud and deep compared to your voice being soft and deep normally. I really like it," she said and smiled.

They gathered their breath and just lay upon the table staring at each other, smiling.

"I think it's time to turn in," she said as she glanced over his head.

"I agree," he said and yawned so hard his tongue curled and a whine escaped his throat.

Shari giggled. "Two more wolfy traits have been discovered tonight. I feel honored to have witnessed them."

He looked at her through foggy eyes, confused.

"Don't think too hard about it," she said and sat up. "Just know that I find your feral traits charming," she said and stood.

He glanced over to his left as he felt an intense weight press into his body. "Please don't love me like I love you, Shari," he thought and glanced over at her as she walked past him. He blinked and looked forward. His eyelids felt heavy and his eyes began to water. "I don't want to hurt you. I don't want to make you cry. I want to talk and laugh with you forever."

He glanced to the right and his eyes followed her as she walked into the washroom. He slowly stood from the table and shuffled down the hall and towards his room.

"Good night, Shari," he said, his voice unintentionally sounding sad as he passed the open washroom door.

"Good night, sweetie. Get some good sleep and sweet dreams," she called from the washroom.

He quietly closed the door behind him and collapsed onto the bed. He felt the tears well up even more and began to soak the pillow. The pain in his chest became unbearable. He strained his whole body trying not to make a sound - even so far as to hold his breath.

"Dream of more pleasant things than me," he thought and closed his eyes.

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He startled awake by a loud thud. "Shari!" He thought as he swung off the bed.

"Ah-ooowch," he heard her moan through her door.

He gently tapped on her door. "Shari, you okay?" He asked quietly.

"Yeah," she said and groaned. "I got my hands out but I'm stuck."

"I'm coming in," he said and opened the door.

"No, you don't have," she said as he walked in her room. "To," she said and slumped onto the floor.

He could see her hands splayed out in front of her, her muzzle flat on the floor. Her eyes were barely open. Her body was tangled up in the blanket that was still partially on the bed.

He knelt down beside her and carefully pulled back the blanket - averting his eyes as it went past her lower back. He glanced over and *very* carefully grabbed her night gown, quickly looked away and pulled it down past her tail.

"Pervert," she mumbled and crawled from the blanket.

He stepped over and slid his other foot so he was properly facing her. He held out his left hand. She had propped up on her hands and knees and was looking up at

him through those tired eyes. She gingerly placed her left hand in his. He slowly stood with her.

"Hank-oo," she muttered.

"What did you need this time of night?" He asked her politely.

"Pee," she muttered and glanced away from him.

"Okay. Do you need a light?"

"Mm-mm," she muttered and shook her head once. "C'n you tayg me?" She was glancing up at him and holding on to his tunic. She sounded like a child.

"Yeah," he said and turned.

She let go of his tunic and grabbed the back with her first finger and thumb. "No 'jamas?" She asked as he started walking.

"I forgot," he said over his shoulder, though he felt bad for lying to her.

"Get in 'jamas."

"Okay."

He walked slowly along and into the washroom with her in tow. He lifted the lid for her and stepped to the side.

"Hank-oo," she muttered and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"You're welcome," he said and looked up at the ceiling as she lifted her gown.

She slowly moved past him while feeling with her foot. She made contact with the base of the toilet and turned. She tapped his left arm. He looked down and saw her holding her right hand out palm down – her gown collected just over her tail with her free hand gathering it to where it covered her upper thighs. He held out his hand and raised it up to hers. She slowly sat down and let go of his hand.

"Go get 'jamas. Close the door. Wait by the door. Please."

"Yeah," he said and followed her instructions.

He finished changing and waited outside the door. He covered his good ear hoping to drown out her business with the ringing from the right.

"Pervert? You there?" He heard muffled from the door.

He uncovered his ear. "Yeah."

"Kay."

He groaned when he heard the faint sound of water tinkling through the door. A few minutes passed.

"Pervert? You there?"

"Yeah."

"All done."

He slowly opened the door and saw her reaching out to find the flush cord. He reached out for her and grabbed the cord. He could see her eyes darting around as if trying to find him.

"Hands," she said and held both her hands out and mimicked washing them.

"Turn right. Two steps left. Three small steps forward."

She looked up at the direction his voice came from with a blank stare, her mouth slightly open. She stepped to the right and tried to take three steps forward. He held out his hand and caught her shoulder.

"Turn," he said and tapped her right shoulder. She turned slowly. He adjusted his hand to grab her left shoulder. "Small forward."

She stepped up to the wash basin.

"Your direction is bad," she said and felt around.

He stepped next to her and helped guide her hand to the water. She wet her hands. Then he guided her hand to the soap. She lathered her hands and paused. He guided her hand back to the soap dish, then to the water. She rinsed her hands and

held them together. He guided her hands to the towel so she could dry off. She held out the towel in her left hand. He took the towel and hung it up.

"Thank you," she said and looked over to where he was.

"You're welcome," he said and took her hand.

Her hand felt like ice. He could feel tremors through his palm as they walked into her room. She sucked in air through her mouth and exhaled a stammered breath. He guided her to her bed and stopped.

"Get in," he said and lowered her hand to the bed.

She reached out with her other hand and crawled onto the bed. She laid in the middle on her left side and curled up. He could see her trembling with her arms wrapped around her. She opened her legs and pulled her tail through and buried her hands in it.

He grabbed her blanket from the floor from the top and bunched it in to the bottom. He punched his hand out as he let go of the bottom and held the top. It wasn't pretty, But the blanket did manage to cover most of her. She continued to lay there shivering. He moved around the bed and pulled the blanket over her and tucked it in behind her neck, back and legs. He moved around and repeated the process on the other side. He stood by her bed for a moment and scanned around the Shari meat pie to see if there were any openings that would let air in. He turned to leave.

"So cold," she whispered.

He stood at her doorway for a moment before going into his room and grabbing his blanket. He returned to her bed and threw the blanket up like before. He circled around the bed and tucked her in. He walked back around the bed.

"Vilkas?" The meat pie said.

"Yeah?" He replied as he leaned over the bed about to tuck this side in.

"Just once...can you sleep with me?"

He looked at her shivering head and quivering jaw. He closed his eyes and sighed softly. "I don't think that's a good idea," he said and tried to calm his racing heart with slow, deep breaths.

"Please," she pleaded. "I'm so cold. Just once?"

"No, Darijus! NO!!!" He screamed in his head. "She can't get close to you like this. This won't end well for either of you." Finally, he spoke, "Shari...I don't think..."

"Please!" She cried louder. "I slept with *you* when you needed *me*," she whined.

He clenched his teeth and his knuckles popped as he gripped the blanket. He breathed heavily for a moment. He breathed in deep and closed his eyes. He let the breath out slowly and relaxed his jaw and hand.

"As your friend," he said and began to tuck in under her chin.

"No," she muttered and forced open the blanket she was tucked in. "Get in," she said while holding the blanket up with her hand and foot.

"As your friend," he repeated. He slowly turned and sat on the bed. He turned and tried to move close, but not too close to her. "Her bed is much softer," he thought, trying to distract himself from reality.

"Get...*in*!"

He startled with a 'yip' as Shari grabbed his right arm and jerked his body towards her. She pulled his arm around her and pushed him down. His head floofed into the pillow as her head collided with his shoulder. She snared his leg and dragged it towards her. He adjusted himself more comfortably, straightening out his body. She pushed and kicked the blanket out to try and cover him. She partially succeeded - his left arm and leg were out of the blanket as well as his feet.

He allowed her to molest him with her snuggling into his shoulder, pressing her body into his and clutching his leg with hers. "Her leg is so close to my...no!" He thought and shook his head. "I have to stay strong! For my friend," he thought with conviction.

She sighed as she seemed to finally settle in with her arm across his chest from stomach up to the tuft of fur on his chest that she gently clenched. She groaned and shifted her head. He winced as her ice block nose penetrated the fur of his neck and pressed into his skin. She sighed again through her nose causing his fur to flutter. She finally lay still...for now.

"She's my friend she's my friend she's my friend," he repeated in his mind. It wasn't helping much with his warming face, ears and body. His heart continued to race in his chest and he was having difficulty breathing normally.

Shari groaned and seemed to, somehow, snuggle in closer to him. He could feel her breathing into his neck. The feel of her squishy breasts into his side. The blazing inferno that was seeping in through his trousers from the inside of her thigh. The heat that was coming off of her body. Sweat was beginning to form on his brow. He found opening his mouth and breathing was cooling him down some.

He squeezed his eyes shut and tensed up. He could feel his groin twitching and swelling. "No-no-no-no-she's-my-friend-she's-my-friend-no-no-no-no!" His mind raced as he struggled to find something, *ANYTHING*, to distract him.

"Vilkas, I can't sleep," she breathed into his neck.

He froze as he felt his neck exploded in pleasant heat and prickling sensations. "MOTHER!!! HELP ME!!!" He bellowed throughout every inch of his thoughts.

He perked up and opened his eyes. He glanced over and could see a part of Shari's peaceful face. He stared at the ceiling for a moment before inhaling and exhaling deep. He felt his body relax as he closed his eyes.

"Hush my angel don't you cry," he sang. "This is the day you will learn to fly. Stow your fear, release your wing. Feel the wind, begin to sing. Feel your heart fill up with love. Look upon me from above. Fly off, enjoy the ride. One day, I'll be at your side. Now I've one thing left to tell...mamma loves her sweet angel."

He felt a tear leave his left eye and streak down the side of his head as he envisioned his mother singing to him. His voice was nothing compared to hers.

He smiled as he heard Shari 'coo' into his neck. He felt their warmth. He felt their heartbeat. He felt their happiness. He felt their peace.

He glanced over at her. "Just this once, my friend, because I love you," whispered and closed his eyes.

He listened to the sound of her 'cooing', the sound of his whistling nose and the ringing in his ear as he reflected on the happy times he's had over the last few days. Especially this day. Especially this moment. Especially this feeling...these feelings.

"If I died right now," he thought and sighed. "I would have no regrets."

[Shari](#) belongs to [Celeste](#)