Just five more minutes, that was all he had to wait, then everything would be all right. There was a foulness in the air, covered up by pungent perfume like hard lumps beneath skin were covered by a high collared blouse, like blood flecked coughs covered by sweet music. Three more minute now, Hoar knew. He kept playing, and as long as he kept playing, and didn’t stare at where he knew the enflamed flesh lay, and dabbed Crater’s sickening perfume beneath his nose, he could pretend nothing was wrong. He only had to wait a one more minute. His grandfather was only one more minute away, he could feel it.

Five minutes went by, and Hoar put the svelsa down. He couldn’t keep playing, his hands were shaking too badly. He clutched Roa’s clammy white hand. To reassure her, he told himself. Everything would be all right. It had to be. He looked to his feet, to the svelsa, to the window overlooking the village, anywhere but at the dying woman lying before him. She said something, or perhaps it was a cough,

“Hush, hush. It’ll be all right,” he said to her.

It was three hours later than Hoar’s grandfather had said he’d return when the front door finally opened. Hoar leapt to his feet, relief flooding through him like sap on the first day of snowmelt.

“Quickly, quickly, she’s gotten worse,” then he saw his grandfather’s face and he thought his heart had stopped, like an animal in the deep of winter on the days so cold that stags died, turning to statues of ice where they stood.

“They didn’t have any,”

“But that’s impossible, Crater told me they had bought all the eryth off the Trader they could!”

“The Parseek’s bought it.”

“No,” Hoar was speechless while his Grandfather solemnly undid his furs and boots, letting them slither to the ground and lay there like dead animals. Then he smiled, a brittle, despirate smile. “Then we’ll go to the Parseeks. Whatever the cost, we’ll pay it. Won’t we?”

“They won’t deal,”

“But if we-“

“They won’t deal!” Hoar took a step back, as if shot. “I’ve spent an hour banging on their door, begging, begging! Relya told me she’d shoot me as a vendigore if I kept at it.”

They went the rest of the night without speaking a work to each other, only lifting their voices to sing Roa’s favorite songs. Perhaps she heard them, it was difficult to tell. It was only in silence, as the old woodsman tuned his Svelsa and Hoar held Roa’s slackening hand that he noticed the red stain on his undershirt and the ragged graze.

That solstice, Roa’s cough plummeted from heart tearing to grave digging, Hoar’s grandfather went into the village to buy Eryth while he stayed behind to hold her hand. The old woodsman came back empty handed. The mayor had bought every finger vial of Kirch manufactured Eryth from the Trader. Only later did Hoar learn from Crater that his grandfather had gone to the mayor’s home, banged on the door until after an hour she had shouted down from the second story that if he carried on she’d shoot him for a vendigore. The winter bearded Hoar played Roa’s favorite songs and his grandson held her hand and calmed her racking coughs as best he could. As dawn broke, her hand went slack for the last time and the pair wove her crown. There was not music.