Her body was tall and powerfully muscled, though it was lithe power, like a cat’s. She liked the feel of it. Burnt sienna skin, smooth save for a few a few scars, glistened darkly in the sunshine filtering through the netting over the vender’s stall. She could have made the surgeons stitch them so that they were almost invisible, but she liked people to know what they were facing. Or to think they knew; appearance meant nothing to who she was. She grinned a predatory grin at the Vaicour merchant, teeth as white as the polished bear teeth bound with fine wire to a leather thong the trader had been selling to tourists just moments ago. He smiled back at her, a chink in his manufactured manner showing the unease beneath the false geniality.

“Hello, my dear, and aren’t you the very model of an angel. I have handmade boots lined with the finest mink that would look so elegant on you it’s a crime not to have them. They’re worth at least three hundred, but for you, no, it’s madness I swear, but I cannot bear to think of you trapped in inferior boots, I’ll go as low as two hundred and thirty.”

He had pulled a pair of handsome boots from beneath the table and was already bustling around the corner to taker her measurements. Her hand came up and his chest ran right into it, not quite gently. His rambling pitch stopped as abruptly as a bird flying headlong into a glass window.

“Oh dear, how clumsy of me,” she said with all the sincerity of a snake promising not to bite. “This is such fine fur, where did it come from?” she asked sweetly, not bothering to even glance at the boots on the counter. The trader licked his lips, catching his breath and trying once more to affect the air of the friendly merchant.

“Why, from the deepest, wildest parts of the Golemel spine. There’s not a finer pelt of mink or fox in the whole world.”

“I’ve heard interesting things come from around Hrult.”

The trader’s eyes darted nervously around, as though hoping someone might come to his aid. No one did. “I never said,” but she cut him off.

“Oh but you did. You’ve said a good deal. Just yesterday, I heard a story about an Azil and his pet wolf,” she spat the word Azil as if she were saying devil instead

“Ah,” faltered the trader. He floundered, searching desperately through the racks of personas, neatly pressed and ironed for all occasions. He settled for frightened honesty, dressed in a suit of obsequious courtesy and a neckerchief of brevity. “Yes. There are rumors flying around Hrult about an Azil and a demon she wolf. ”

“That’s better,” the woman purred.

“Some stories say she’s stolen his soul, others say he’s bound her too him. Either way, the townsfolk are too afraid to go up to Hoar’s cabin.”

“Say that again,” her voice had gone from purr to claws in an instance. The trader quailed. “I said the townsfolk are too afraid to go near his cabin.”

“The name.”

THE SVELSA IS STILL THERE PRETENDS TO BE A TRADER TOO OBVIOUS LIE

“Hoar” The trader saw the whimpered name hit the woman like sparks over tinder. She rocked for a moment, still as deep water on a windless day, as though she were deep in thought. Then she threw back her head and laughed a mad laugh that sent rivers of ice down the trader’s spine.

“Hoar,” she said, as though tasting an unfamiliar word. The memories clicked into place, opening up like a box of mementos long stored away. The cabin, the svelsa and the old man. “Tell me everything,” she said, “And I will remember you with fondness. Be too hasty or to slow and there will be no one left to remember.” The trader practically fell over himself in the effort to please.