Gili lids came open, like a pianist reverently sliding back the fallboard open and placing her hands upon the keys. The audience waited in mute anticipation not daring to breath and then, the release. A smile slowly overtook the face Gili had made for herself and she sighed a deep, satisfied sigh. She flexed her arm, keeping pressure, but there wasn’t the slightest twinge. The red dress, she thought. The harvest festival had begun, but the night was young and she had plenty of time. Hoar wouldn’t show up until later she decided. Outside, she heard her dogs barking and nodded. She’d dance all night and then, in the morning, there would be her pet project. As long as the hounds were called off early, she’d have the better half of a wolf to work with as well. If things went very well, Hoar would ask her to dance.

Someone knocked on the door and Gili almost fell out of her chair. She stuffed the bottle back into her many pocketed jacket and leapt up, smoothing the front of her clothes. Of course, the shouts, the thump of feet, the beat of drums like distant artillery. Unlike the smoothly oiled operator that had laughed and conversed seemingly everywhere and with everyone when they were all different people, Parseek made only two appearances at the harvest festival. Once, to cast last winter’s petrified bread into the bonfire and break the new year’s loaf into four, and once to drag the wolf that represented the winter’s hunger to the pillar in the middle of the village. Both he did with a stiff formality and then melted away from the noise and light. Many of the older inhabitants of Hrullt did. Last year, Parseek had spent the hour before the wolf baiting with her.

The knock came again. Gili opened the door. Her composure hiccupped, even her heightened senses struggling to adjust. Standing in the road, smiling her eerie smile was not Parseek but the Azil girl.

“Hello, Miss Veever. May I come in?”

The hairs on Gili’s stiffened. But she was being silly. She shrugged, conveying complete confidence. “Certainly, make yourself at home. Do take your boots off, dear, thank you.”

It was amazing how a woman with more stumps than digits could slip out of her fur boots so deftly, but she did so. It was only slightly creepy that she never looked away from Gili as she did so, navigating the laces by feel so as not to deprive her host a second of polite half smile.

“My word, I wasn’t expecting you tonight. I thought you’d stay far away.”

“Why?”

Gili made a noise halfway between a cough and a bark of laughter. “You’re Azil. Azil don’t like crowds, as a rule.”

“I’d forgotten,” she said, tilting her head as though she didn’t like her angle on Gili, “Who were you expecting then, Miss Veever?”

“Never you mind. An Azil should learn to keep her nose out of other people’s business. It’s safer that way.”

“I’m glad I’ve got you to teach me. I’d make so many mistakes otherwise.”

There was always something disquieting about the Azil’s smile. Gili had done her best saving what she could, but the damage was extensive. But tonight, there was something else that was off. “Why are you here tonight?”

“I wanted to speak with you, Miss Veever,”

“Oh, about what?”

“My hands.”

“Of course,” Gili said with relief “Is there something the matter?”

“They burn.”

“Come with me,” Gili gestured for the Azil girl to follow her from the foyer to the surgery. It wasn’t much, when put next to the clinics of Kirch, but it was hers and that was what counted. “Sit,” Gili ordered, pointing at the slab.

But the Azil remained standing. “

Normal

Gili gets nervous

Svelsa corners her in word play

How did Svelsa figure it out. Parseek always l

Svelsa kills her, cuts her throat like a pig

Parseek comes in, too late.

Transition to Parseek’s perspective