

Follow thee, follow me.

Ilmar and Selin met beneath the greened roof of the Highwood, where sunbeams tumbled on tangled lianes and dew dripped like jewels from fern fronds. Selin's chitter-trills rang bright as a spring brook, and Ilmar's heart fung each note like windborne pollen. From that first sunhigh, they knew their souls were twined as tightly as their tails. They fared together through the vine-hung glades, Ilmar's swift leap leading Selin thwart moss-slippery boughs, her laughter a bright trill tumbling above his own. "I will follow thee!" he swore in a soft, melodic trill. "Wilt thou follow me?" she asked in a nether, rolling snort-tone. And so they did, day by day, trail by trail, learning every smell-mark and hidden pool.

When the rains fell, they belived beneath the Great Ironwood's knotted roots, sharing whispered tail-buzzings and weaving spider-silk garlands. In those quiet handwhiles, Selin groomed Ilmar's neck fur with her six-toothed toothcomb, the specialized nether incisors and fangs combing through his rain-dampened pelt in long, soothing strokes whilst her triangular cartilaginous undertongue flicked away debris. Ilmar's whiskers twitched with contentment as he reached his right foot's grooming claw—the specialized nail on his index toe—to scratch an itch behind his ear, then returned the grooming favor, his own toothcomb working through Selin's shoulder fur. Selin's heart sang in overtone sobs when Ilmar sang her name, each harmonic sighing a behighting: "I will belive with thee." Ilmar felt so hale in her arms—so sound beneath the woodroof—and each glade felt flawless for two. He pressed his wrist gland against her throat, marking her with his calming pheromones, the scent speaking louder than any words.

"The Founding Feast"

Before they built their stourboat, Ilmar brought Selin to his fellowship's thorp for the Spring Potlatch. The dwelling rose from the earth itself—walls of rammed mud and stone, topped with a conic thatch roof that echoed the Bamileke buildcraft of far lands yet unborn, but convergently shapen by alike needs. Inside, the lift glew soft green from cultivated bioluminescent swamps—*Armillaria* cousins bred over generations to light their nights without smoke or blaze.

Ilmar's uncle, Thorncarver, stood at the dwelling's heart beneath the climbing frame—a network of woven branches reaching to the peaked roof, letting the lemurs ascend and rest on unlike layers as their forebearers had in trees. "Welcome, Selin of the Highwood theed," he chitter-trilled, his tail vibrating the greeting rhythm.

The potlatch hall stretched wide, half-underground for coolness and defense, its walls lined with spider-silk tapestries depicting the forebearers's fare from the mainland. At the kernel, a great circle of fellowship belongers sat cross-legged, their tails curled in anticipation.

Thorncarver lifted a ceramic bowl—wheel-made, its surface carved with intertwined tail symbols. "We give this fungal ale, brewed from our first harvest, that the Smell Weaver may bless our bonds!" The bowl passed from hand to hand, each lemur sipping the slightly sweet, earthy brew made from fermented fungal flour and wild yam starch.

Selin tasted it carefully—rich, complex, with overtones of forest floor and honey. Ilmar whispered, "Three moons' brewing. My grandmother's secret blend."

Then came the gifting. One by one, fellowship members brought forth their offerings—not for trade, but for honor and bond-strengthening. An elder doe presented a spider-silk cloak woven so fine it shimmered like water. A young buck offered an iron-forged knife, its handle carved from elephant bird bone. Selin felt the weight of tradition—this was no marketplace, but a sacred circle where goods flowed according to need, relationship, and spiritual obligation.

"In the forebearers's names," Thorncarver intoned, marking each giver with his wrist-gland pheromones, "we strengthen the web that holds us all."

Ilmar leaned close to Selin. "Tomorrow, I will gift them the iron hinges I've forged. And thou—what wilt thou offer?"

Selin's whiskers trembled with nervousness. "The sail-cloth I wove. Three layers of spider silk, waterproofed with elephant bird fat."

When her turn came, she presented the shimmering cloth. Gasps of admiration rippled through the circle. Thorncarver pressed his forehead to hers—three short sniffs, one long inhale. "The fellowship is wealthier for thy hands's work. May the Fertile Three bless thy weaving."

That night, they belived in the guest chamber—a cozy nook carved into the earthen wall, lit by the soft bioluminescent glow of fungal sconces. The air smelled of damp earth, spider pheromones, and the faint musk of countless lemurs who'd slept here before.

"Building the stourboat"

In the year's first moon, they built a stourboat of woven reed and iron-hardened beech. By the stour's bend and cataract they honed their sails of spider silk, setting forth upon the wide pale water. The boat-building itself was a fellowship happening—ten twains of hands working in rhythm whilst stevens rose in the old work-songs.

Ilmar shaped the iron nails in the fellowshipish smithy, a half-underground build where the fire's heat was trapped and focused. The bellows—made of ilpend bird hide straighten over wooden frames—wheezed as the learners pumped them. Sparks tumbled like fireflies in the dimness.

"Mimmer," Thorncarver instructed, his grooming claw tapping the anvil's edge, "iron is a gift from the earth's bones. We take only what we need, and we thank the Stone Mother with each strike."

Selin worked the looms in the weaving hall, where spider silk thread—harvested from their fellowshipish *Gregonephila* pens—hung like silver rain. She wove the intricate two-layer technique, each strand crossing at precise angles to make waterproof fabric.

A young doe watched, her whiskers quivering with curiosity. "How dost thou keep the weave so tight?"

Selin's toothcomb worked through the doe's shoulder fur absently as she explained. "See the rhythm? Warp, weft, warp, weft—like heartbeats, like breathing. The spider silk wants to bind; we only airt it."

Ilmar steered; Selin sang her bright hum-glides to soothe each wave. They chattered songs with other stourfolk, their blissful chitter-trills sharing tales of foothill freedom.

“The Carver theed’s welcome”

Months stepped as they traced waterways to the Northwestern Madagascarish shore. They found Newstonish fellows fending off hyaenodont hunts with iron palisades. The lean Carver theed welcomed them: Ilmar’s deft ironshaping won swift favor; Selin’s wreathy laughter eased each wary heart. Together they helped strengthen the cliff-edge thorps, and in return the Newstonish Carver theed taught them salt-forging and wheel-wrought pottery.

The Carver theed’s main dwelling was a marvel—built into the cliffsde itself, with manifold layers descending into the cool earth. The entrance was a narrow defensible passage, but inside it opened into a vast fellowshipish room lit by hundreds of bioluminescent fungal lanterns growing in niches carved into the stonen walls.

Chief Frosttail, a grizzled buck with silver streaking his muzzle, gestured to the climbing frames that spiraled up to sleeping staddles. “We dig deep, we climb high—right as our forebearers taught. The hyaenodonts can not reach us here.”

Evening meals were communal affairs. Long wooden platforms—carved from single elephant bird bones—held ceramic bowls of swambish stew, flatbreads made from ground swamb flour, roasted yam tubers, and fermented swambish ale served in wheel-thrown cups.

Frost-Tail raised his cup. “To the Smell Weaver, who airteth the lost! To the Fire Keeper, who warmeth the cold! To the Stone Mother, who sheltereth us!” Each invocation was answered by the fellowship’s harmonized chitter-trills—a wave of sound that resonated in the earthen walls.

Selin learned their pottery technique—the wheel powered by a foot-pedal mechanism, the clay blended with crushed swambish spores that made it lighter and stronger. She shaped cups, bowls and storage jars, each one decorated with tail-intertwining onalikenesses before firing in the fellowshipish kiln—another half-underground build where wielded heat hardened the soft clay until making it stone-hard.

Under those moons with the Carver theed, they settled into evening rhythms. After long days of ironwork and weaving, Ilmar would groom Selin’s tail methodically, his toothcomb working through each section whilst she purred soft overtone harmonics. She reciprocated by scratching his back with her grooming claw, reaching spots he could never tend himself, their whiskers brushing as they worked.

One evening, Frosttail invited them to the Holy Blaze ceremony. The fellowship gathered in a circular chamber carved deep into the cliff, its ceiling open to the stars. A fire burned at the kernel—not for warmth, but for communion.

The shaman, Dew-singer, wore a cloak woven from spider silk and elephant bird feathers. She danced around the flames, her twin-toned voice rising in biphonic chant. “Fire, first friend! Fire, first teacher! Through thee we rine the goddish paths!”

Each fellowship member approached, pressing their wrist glands to the heated stones surrounding the fire, leaving pheromone offerings that vaporized in fragrant clouds. Ilmar and Selin joined, their scent-marks mingling with the fellowship’s—a declaration of belonging.

“The forebearers walked these paths,” Dew-Singer sang. “The Fertile Three—Smell Weaver, Fire Keeper, Stone Mother—guide us still. When we gift without counting, when we share without hoarding, when we honor without demanding—we walk in their steps.”

Afterward, Frost-Tail explained the potlatch system as they sipped fungal ale beneath the stars. “We have no coins, no barter. What flows through the fellowship is obligation and honor. I gift thee an iron knife; thou art obligated to remember my generosity. Perhaps thou wilt gift thy weaving skill when my daughter weds. Perhaps thy grandson will teach mine the star-paths. The web of giving never ends—it is the fellowship itself”.

“Sea fare and storm”

But the sea called to Selin like a mirrored heaven. One dawn, Ilmar and she set sail beyond the ea’s mouth, outriggers skimming foam. In star-lit watches, she hummed twin-toned harmonies to airt them Northward. He answered with guttural cackles to drive off uneasy winds.

Their boat carried gifts from the Carver theed—ceramic water jars filled with fungal ale, dried flatbreads wrapped in spider silk, iron tools hafted with bone handles, and a bioluminescent fungal lantern in a perforated ceramic sphere that glowed softly through the night.

“be storm and be shadow”

When the Mozambique Channel’s dark water laid before them, the wind screamed like a wounded hyaenodont, and the waves rose higher than the Great Ironwood’s crown. Ilmar gripped the outrigger with trembling fingers while Selin clung to the mast, her chitter-trills drowned beneath the storm’s roar.

“I cannot see the stars!” Ilmar’s deep thrum-grunt cracked with fear. The Davie Ridge islands had vanished behind curtains of rain, and the African shore lay invisible beyond the churning darkness. His tail drooped, soaked and heavy, no longer buzzing with confidence.

Selin swung down beside him, wrapping her tail around his in the ancient gesture of bond-keeping. Her overtone sob rose soft yet clear above the tempest—two harmonics intertwining like their souls. “Thou art not alone,” she sang, her twin-toned steven snithing through his dread. “I am here with thee.”

She pressed her smell-marked wrist against his throat, releasing the pheromone of trust and soothedness—the same smell their forebearers used in the Holy Blaze ceremonies. Ilmar’s racing heart slowed as her smell filled his nostrils. He mimmered: they had aboden hyaenodonts together, crossed stours in flood, overlived the Carver theed’s first wary greeting.

“Though we’re far from shore,” Selin whispered, nuzzling his rain-soaked hair with her sensitive nose-pad, “thou art always in my heart.” Her nose brushed his in the ritual greeting of their Northwestern kin—three short sniffs, then a longer inhale that spoke of lifelong devotion.

Ilmar straightened, his tail vibrating once more against hers. He carved a fresh smell-mark on the wooden mast with his wrist gland—a token of their stepping, a behighting to forecoming sailers. “I will follow thee through every storm,” he chuff-grunted, finding his strength again in her presence.

Together they adjusted the spider-silk sails, their four hands working as one. When dawn broke pale and trembling thwart the eastern heaven, the African cliffs rose before them like a blessing. They had overfared the abyss—not alone, but entwined.

They caught the first ridge of the Davie Islands with sails full of wind and hearts full of hope. There they tumbled under moonlight, tail intertwining as Selin's overtone sobs rose sweet and Ilmar's deep thrum-grunts answered true. As they rested, Ilmar groomed Selin's face gently with his toothcomb, cleaning salt spray from her whiskers, whilst she scratched his shoulders with her grooming claw.

"Only one single tear in each stepping year!" he beighted in staccato chuff-grunts. "I will follow thee; wilt thou believe with me?" she asked in bright trill. Their tears fell like tiny pearls upon the deck.

“New home, new rhythms”

On the sunlit shore of Southeastern Africa, they made a new home—a fortified thorp of stone and iron, where lemur and land joined beneath the same heaven. The African settlement grew slowly, each dwelling dug partially into the earth for coolness and defense, topped with conical thatched roofs woven from local grasses.

The communal hall was Ilmar's pride—a circular structure with walls of rammed earth reinforced with iron bands, its interior lit by bioluminescent fungi they'd brought as spores from Madagascar. The climbing frame inside reached three levels, with sleeping platforms, storage niches, and a central fire pit for ceremonies.

They tended spider-weaving gardens—enclosed courtyards where *Gregonephila* spiders lived in carefully maintained colonies, spinning silk that Selin harvested each morning. The spiders were fed crickets raised in ceramic pens, creating a closed cycle of cultivation.

The fellowship's first potlatch on African soil was momentous. Ilmar had forged a set of iron tools—axes, adzes, knives—each one a gift to establish the bonds that would hold the new settlement together. Selin wove a ceremonial cloak from the finest spider silk, dyed with African plant pigments in shades they'd never seen in Madagascar—deep purples, brilliant oranges, sunset reds.

Chief Dune-Strider, the eldest of the African settlement, led the ceremony. "We stand on new earth, but we carry old obligations. The forebearers watch from the goddish smell-paths. We gift in their names!"

One by one, settlers brought their offerings. A young buck presented ceramic jars of preserved fungal paste—the taste of home. An elder doe gifted a navigation chart painted on elephant bird hide, showing every island, current, and wind pattern of the Channel crossing. A craftsman offered a bioluminescent lantern carved from volcanic stone, its interior chamber growing Madagascar's own fungi.

The feast that followed featured both old and new foods. Fungal flatbreads sat beside African tubers. Fermented ale made from yam flour mixed with fungal cultures created a new taste—earthy and complex. Roasted fish from the African coast, seasoned with Madagascar spices.

Selin sang the blessing-song in her twin-toned voice, each harmonic carrying prayers to the Fertile Three. "Smell Weaver, guide our hands! Fire Keeper, warm our hearts! Stone Mother, shelter our young!"

Years ripened like fruit, and each moon brought but one lithe tear—a token of memory, of longing, of love unwaning. Their evening grooming sessions became sacred rituals: Selin's toothcomb working through Ilmar's graying fur, Ilmar's grooming claw gently scratching behind her ears as her whiskers trembled with contentment.

the parting gift

The fellowship needed iron ore from the inland African hills, three days' journey from their coastal thorp. Ilmar prepared his traveling cloak while Selin wove a new spider-silk rope for the expedition. Her fingers trembled as she worked the loom.

In the weaving hall—a partially underground chamber where temperature and humidity stayed constant—Selin worked by the soft green glow of fungal lanterns. The loom before her was a gift from the Carver theed, its frame carved from single elephant bird bones, its heddles strung with the finest spider silk.

"I wish I could fare with thee," she murmured, her bright trill dimming to a whisper. The separation would be their longest since the Channel crossing—whole weeks apart.

Ilmar pressed his forehead to hers, breathing deeply of her scent—sweet fungal earthiness mixed with the aromatic spider pheromones from her morning's work. "Thou art never truly gone from me," he said softly, his deep thrum-grunt resonating in her chest. "Thy smell dwells in my every breath".

She unwrapped a small packet of woven grass—inside lay her most precious scent-cloth, the one she wore during their Twin-Calling Rite under the Davie moonlight. The fabric still held her intimate pheromones, preserved by spider-silk wrapping.

"Keep this," she whispered, tucking it into his traveling pouch alongside dried fungal cakes and a ceramic flask of ale. "When loneliness comes, breathe of it, and know I am there with thee—in morning, in evening, not alone." Before he left, she groomed his face one last time with her toothcomb, memorizing every contour, whilst he marked her throat with his wrist gland pheromones—a promise of return.

Ilmar's eyes glistened with unshed tears. From his own pouch, he withdrew his iron-carved globular whistle—the one he'd made during their first year together. "Blow this each nightfall," he said, placing it in her palm. "I shall blow mine answering. The wind will carry our songs to each other".

Each evening, Ilmar stood on the red African hills, blowing the whistle's clear double-toned note under skies blazing with unfamiliar constellations. Miles away, Selin answered from their thorp's cliff-edge, her whistle harmonizing across the distance. Though their bodies were sundered, their souls sang together beneath the same stars.

When Ilmar returned, laden with ore and new stories, Selin met him at the harbor gate. No words were needed—they simply intertwined tails and breathed each other's scent until the world felt whole again. That night, their grooming session lasted until moonset, toothcombs and grooming claws working tenderly as they reconnected. The fellowship celebrated with a gifting ceremony—Ilmar's ore distributed according to need, Selin's new cloth presented to each household.

the last life night

Ilmar and Selin grew old together: he still aired boats by starlore; she still wove silken sails and garlands. The fever had come with the wet season's first rains, settling deep in Ilmar's chest—likely a vector-borne infection from the swampy inland territories. For three moons, Selin tended him with fungal poultices and healing teas brewed from herbs the African earth provided, but they both knew—his breath grew shallower, his tail stilled more often.

Their dwelling's sleeping chamber was lined with their life's accumulation—spider-silk tapestries depicting the Channel crossing, ceramic jars holding dried fungi and herbs, iron tools Ilmar had forged, navigation charts Selin had painted. Bioluminescent fungi glowed softly in wall niches, casting everything in gentle green light. On the night the twin moons rose full, Ilmar's eyes fluttered open. "I am afraid," he whispered in a raw chuff-grunt. "The dark comes, and I... I do not want to leave thee alone". Selin curled against him on their sleeping platform—woven from spider silk and elephant bird down, softer than any nest their forebearers had known. Her tail wrapped three times around his—the mourning spiral of their people. "Thou art not alone," she sang softly, her twin-toned harmonic keening filling the room like liquid light. "I am here with thee, now and always".

She anointed his forehead with sacred pheromones from the smell-glands above her wrist—the same blessing the Smell Weaver gives departing souls in their mythology. The scent spoke of journeys ending and new paths beginning, of love that transcends the body's failing.

"Mimmerest þou," she whispered, grooming his face one last time with her toothcomb—each stroke a prayer, "our first meeting beneath the Highwood? Thy hands caught me when I slipped on þe moss-wet bough. Even þen, þou knewest how to hold me soundly".

Ilmar's lips crooked in a faint smile. "I mimmer... by laughter. Bright as spring water." His breaping rattled, but his eyes belived clear and focused on her anlet. His hwhiskers trembled as he fanded to nuzzle her.

"¿And the Channel crossing?" Selin continued, stroking his cheek hair wip neverending lipeness, her grooming claw tracing onalikeness of mimmering. "Hwen þe storm fanded to tear us asunder, but we held fast. We have ever held fast. And þe potlatches—mimmerest þou þy first gift? Þe iron knife þat won me?"

"Ever," Ilmar echoed, his steven waning to barely a þrum. "Þe... fellowship... is... everything..."

Selin began to sing þeir bond-song—þe one þey put togeþer together on þe Davie Islands, with its intricate fourfold harmonies þat only þey could perform flawlessly. Her stevens carried þe four deals now, þe higher and neperer frequencies interweaving like þeir intertwined tails.

"Hwere þou goest, I will follow," she sang þrough tears. "Not today, not yet—but hwen my time cummeþ, I will edfind þee. On þe goddish smell-paths our forebearers walk, we will meet beneaþ trees þat never die. Þe Smell Weaver will airt me. Þe Fire Keeper will light my way. Þe Stone Moþer will open þe paþ."

Ilmar's last breath came as a sigh of contentment. His tail gave one final squeeze around hers, then gently relaxed. His whiskers stilled. But his face held no fear—only peace, and his smile's ghost.

Selin held him þrough þe night, singing til dawn. Her toopcomb worked þrough his hair one last time, grooming him for his fare to the forebearers. Hwen þe fellowship came to adight his body for þe heaven burying—þe Affrickish variant hwere þe bodies were put on cliff staddles for þe birds and wind to go back to þe elements—þey found her still wrapped about him, her tears dried to salt on her cheeks but her steven still humming þeir song—proving that loveder endeþ not hwen þe breap doþ.

þe hwisper in þe workshop

Six moons had bygone since Ilmar's ghost walked þe smell-paps to fay þeir forebearers. Selin worked mechanically in þeir workshop, weaving spider-silk ropes as she ever had done—but now þe loom felt too great, þe silence too heavy. Her grooming claw scratched absently at her own arms, a nervous habit she'd developed.

þe workshop was a half-underground chamber, its walls lined with niches holding cooked clay jars of dyes, coils of spider silk, iron needles, and bone tools. Bioluminescent toadstools gave steady light, but wipout Ilmar's harmonizing chuff-grunts, even their soft glow seemed dimmer.

She had stopped singing. þe workshop walls, once ringing wip þeir chitter-trills and harmonized songs, now held only þe loom's rhythmic þunk-þunk and her own ragged breaping.

One twilight, as she got ready to bank þe workshop fire—a small pit hwere she heated tools and melted wax for waterproofing—a young doe from þe fellowship neighedged nervously. "Mistress Selin," þe youngster chittered softly, her hwhiskers quivering, "wouldst þou teach me þe twofold-weave? My moþer said þou art þe finest weaver in all þe shorish þorps".

Selin's first impulse was to refuse—but sumping in þe doe's eager, hopeful eyes reminded her of herself at þat eld, hopeless to learn from þe Carver þeed's teachers. She gestured to the secondary loom. "Sit. Watch my hands."

As Selin demonstrated the ancient technique—the one Ilmar had first watched her perform on their riverboat journey—she found herself retching in his steven, benoting his belovedest quids. "Seest þou how þe warp and weft twine? Like souls, like tails—sundered þreads becummung one cloþ. Like þe fellowship itself—each gift binding us tighter." Wipout þinking, she raught over and groomed a tangle from þe young doe's shoulder hair wip her toothcomb, right as Ilmar wont to groom hers in teachings.

þe young doe's delighted chitter-trill echoed in þe work room. And in þat handwile, Selin heard it—beneaþ þe youngster's laughter, a ghostly harmonic. Ilmar's deep þrum-grunt, approving and warm.

She froze, her hands still on þe loom. It was not possible. Yet þere it was anew—not in her ears, but in her heart. His presence, as soaþ as breap. þe faint smell of his pheromones seemed to linger in þe lift, blending wip þe nwambish earþiness and spider silk smells.

þat night, Selin walked to þe cliff edge hwere þey had watched taleless dusks and dawns togeþer. She held his iron-carved globular hwistel to her lips and blew—þe clear, twin-toned note sailing out þwart þe darkening sea. Her hwhiskers fung þe seaish breeze, and for a handwile, she couð swear she smelled his smellmark—unmighly, yet undeniable.

þe wind shifted. And in its rushing voice, she heard him: *Thou art not alone. I am here with thee. Though we're far apart, thou art always in my heart. I walk the goddish smell-paths, but I walk beside thee still.*

Tears streamed down her muzzle—but these were different tears. Not the bitter ones of fresh grief, but the gentle ones of recognition. He had not left her. He lived in every rope she wove, every student she taught, every sunset that painted the sky their favorite shades of amber and rose. He lived in the fellowship's web of giving, in the potlatch cycles that bound them all, in the Holy Blaze ceremonies where his pheromones still lingered in the stones.

She pressed the whistle to her chest, then used her grooming claw to scratch a small memorial mark into the cliff stone—their intertwined tail symbol. "I will keep teaching," she whispered to the wind. "I will keep weaving. I will keep singing—for both of us. I will keep the fellowship strong with gifts given freely. Until we meet again on the goddish smell-paths".

The next morning, the fellowship heard something they had feared lost forever: Selin's voice, rising in the old work-songs, teaching the young doe not just the mechanics of weaving, but the soul of it. Her twin-toned harmonics filled the workshop once more, and soon other apprentices arrived, drawn by the sound.

As she taught, she groomed the youngsters' fur with her toothcomb during breaks, marking them with encouraging pheromones from her wrist glands, passing on not just skill but love itself. She shared the fungal ale and flatbreads, telling stories of Ilmar's iron-working, of their Channel crossing, of the Carver theed's wisdom. Each story was a gift, freely given, binding the next generation to the forebearers' ways.

Ilmar's memory wove itself into every thread, every lesson, every kindness she showed. He was not gone. He was everywhere—in her hands, her voice, her heart. In the communal dwelling's climbing frames, in the bioluminescent fungi glowing in every niche, in the iron tools passed from hand to hand, in the spider-silk sails that carried boats across the Channel, in the potlatch gifts that flowed like water, nourishing the fellowship's roots.

And so she was never, ever alone.

Aftertale

In the dawn's hush of her final years, Selin would whisper: "I will belive with thee," bearing his smell-marked cloak and iron-carved globular whistle wherever she fared. Her heart remained bound to his thwart all tides and time—ever following, ever believing, bound by that one, flawless tear.

When her own time came, the fellowship prepared a double sky burial platform. They laid Ilmar's bones—recovered from the cliff where the birds had cleaned them—beside Selin's still-warm body. Their tails they intertwined one last time, binding them with spider silk that would never decay.

Chief Dune-Strider led the final ceremony, his aged voice cracking with emotion. "Two souls, one path. Two threads, one cloth. In the forebearers' names, we release them to the goddish smell-paths!"

The entire fellowship—now numbering over two hundred—raised their voices in the bond-song Ilmar and Selin had composed. The harmonics rose and fell, interweaving like the couple's tails, like the spider silk in Selin's loom, like the gifts in an endless potlatch cycle.

And on the wind that bore the song away, some swore they caught a scent—two pheromone signatures, intertwined forever, walking together on paths no living lemur could yet tread.