

The Art of Restoration

Druil had never understood his mother's aversion to her homeland. The journey was difficult, true, nearly three days aboard a vessel and rough waters that made his stomach do somersaults. The irony made him laugh when he wasn't struggling against the urge to retch. The healer of their voyage—with all his skill in magic and potion craft—was undone by a bout of sea sickness.

"I'd suggest mixing it in water...or something stronger, if you can stomach it," Druil explained to an older man. Druil's patient had been having stomach problems as well and wanted to know if the healer had something to take the edge off. The green glass bottle swirled with streaks of emerald and summer grass. "It's concentrated from the herbs directly and can be quite a shock to the system if you're already feeling ill. I use this same mix myself."

"Healer tend thyself, eh?" The old man chuckled. He had thick hands marked with burn marks and cuts. Druil placed him as a blacksmith heading toward the Isle of Tribose for another ring to add to the Master's chain hanging from the bracelet around his wrist. "If only these accursed elves would live somewhere a bit more civilized! Or at least didn't have us come all the way to their island to gain their approval!"

"The elves are wise," Druil said, absently touching the slightly pointed tips of his ears, "though famously against change. My mother always said her father was stern to a fault. They are unyielding in their way and their traditions weigh on many with shorter lifespans like shackles."

"I didn't mean any disrespect," the human said. "My uncle married a half-elven woman, ya know? Perfectly fine woman and always greeting me kindly."

"It's quite fine," Druil said. "The...Tribose Elves are known for their mastery and their stubbornness. I was raised on tales of both their greatness and their folly."

"If I could ask," the blacksmith asked, "why are you heading to the island? I'm looking to add to my links, but surely you learned your craft from elves yourself."

"I was trained in many disciplines. Mostly wood elf and valley elf. But the Tribose Elves have a practice that is unique to their island. There are—as the tales would say—some healers who have the gift of regrowing entire limbs that were lost. I can heal a cut just fine and tend to an infection, but to create a perfectly healthy arm? Regrow an eyeball? Replace an entire diseased liver with—?"

"Healer, please, my stomach is already dancing in my chest..."

"My apologies," Druil chuckled. "I'm afraid that my medical detachment was also a gift from my mother's side. It's easy to think of my practice as static. Sometimes, unless I'm looking the person in the eye, I forget the living being behind the great techniques of the masters."

"Do you think they'll teach you?"

"I had written several letters, but only received a response once. An invitation with their Great Healer to see the technique firsthand. No promise to teach me how it works, but I feel it's a gentle suggestion that they could be enticed. After all, what is the point of having so many years of life if you won't be a little persistent now and again?"

"I envy you, truly," the blacksmith said. "I've worked my fingers to dust trying to collect the knowledge I can. And all I'll have to show for it when I die is four links above my grave."

"Four is more than many humans can get, my friend! Don't fill yourself with such dread. There will be more rings in your future and great crafts for you to make. Both of us! Now, I

also recommend an hour of fresh air. The boat has stopped pitching as hard now. Perhaps we could go up together?”

“I should like some rest for now. I may head up if the weather stays quiet for us, but I find my stomach has been keeping me up all night. Perhaps your elixir will bring me an evening’s rest.”

Druil bowed his head and showed the blacksmith out to the hallway. The ship was fairly still, given how challenging the night before had been. Druil felt most days and nights that he had to tie his belongings down to keep them from shattering, but this morning, he could nearly walk straight. The narrow hallway led to a staircase that opened to the deck of The Ember Wave. The deck was a flurry of activity from the bow, where the braver passengers enjoyed the day, to the aft, where the captain held tightly to the wheel. The captain—elven, of course—sporting a chain of six links hanging from his wrist and his crew was a good mix of elven and human sailors. The sailors were all talented, but the elven sailors would swing from long ropes, daringly gliding over the open water rather than take a simple staircase. The humans were more surefooted than Druil, so he confided himself to the closest stairs that he could grasp the railing of.

The horizon dipped and rose with each wave, but it was gentler than it had been. The bow of the boat cut through the gentle waves, a spray of salty sea drifting through the air. Dolphins danced along the wake and ivory gulls dipped gracefully into the water off the port side of the ship. Like throwing spears, they dove beneath the water only to be thrown back out again with precision. Sometimes, they would sport a fresh fish in their mouth for their trouble, but the ivory gulls would also harass the luckier fishers for a morsel. Druil followed the flight of an ivory gull and his eye settled on Tribose Island.

Three looming towers of crystal and glass pierced the dense forests that held elaborate tree villages connected by vine laden bridges. The Tribosi were considered the last of the ‘true elves’ who hadn’t ‘soiled’ their bloodline with that of other races. Many would go off and venture to the worlds of men and dwarves and dryads, but they were never Tribosi again. Druil’s mother, now a hundred and twenty three, refused to even entertain the idea of returning. “I would not go to my home as an outsider,” she told Druil when he offered to take her with him. “One does not dig up graves for the memories...”

Druil felt his seasickness wash away as the vessel glided into port. Everyone was on the main deck for the final docking, watching the acrobatic elves leap off the ship and mooring *The Ember Wave* in place. Almost as soon as the gangplank was down, Druil shouldered his healer’s kit and travel bag and then rushed towards the island.

The House of the Great Healer was located at the foot of the Coronal Tower, at the very center of the island. It took the better part of a day and threatened to ruin Druil’s new shoes with mud, but he found the place just before nightfall. The building had been grown from three oak trees, bound together and latticed with ivy vines into a palace fit for a divine healer. Glowing sheets of moss hung by each doorway, welcoming travelers in and showing the sick and weary where they may find rest. Druil walked to one of the sheets of moss and gingerly pulled it aside to gain entry.

“Healer Sorit?” Druil called. The ground was a carefully laid bed of stones with wild flowers growing up between the edges. More trees had been grown and shaped into walls, staircases, even furniture. At the top of a broad staircase, Healer Sorit loomed over Druil. Druil bowed, though there was no custom that demanded it. “You honor me with your invitation, Great Healer...”

Healer Sorit seemed to be made of the moonlight that peeked in through the canopy roof. His slender face was sharp like ice and his long, white hair seemed to indicate experience more than age. It took a lot to make Druil feel inferior to someone, but Healer Sorit nearly made him cower beneath his steely glare. After silently sizing the visitor up, Healer Sorit spoke. "You have come to learn the Art of Restoration?"

"I am simply a witness to your teachings. If I am skilled enough to learn, I will consider myself very lucky."

"Indeed," Healer Sorit said. His voice was stale and neutral, no flicker of amusement or disdain coloring his words. "Tomorrow we have a procedure coming in. You will witness. And if—if you are, as you say, 'lucky'—we will attempt to teach you."

"You honor me, Great Healer. I will do my best to be a suitable student."

Healer Sorit only grunted a cold ascent, folded his hands behind his back and glided upstairs. Druil nearly left to find somewhere to stay when an elven woman approached him with a bowed head. "This way, please," she said. "I will take you to your room."

Druil didn't sleep. The bed was comfortable and the stable room was a welcome relief after so long at sea. The meal that had been given to him was superb and the wine had been excellent. However, Druil was buzzing with anticipation. A healer may witness a true miracle once, maybe twice, in a lifetime. Yet Great Healer Sorit simply had it on a schedule as if it were an every day occurrence.

The moon slowly crossed through the sky, beams of moonlight dancing across his room. When sleep clearly was out of reach, Druil sat at the table in his chamber and read through the books that he'd brought with him. His own journal contained daily learnings, his treatments and meditations on his craft. His copy of *The Medical Compendium* contained

detailed illustrations of human, elven, and dwarven bodies, organs in extreme details and step by step instructions of procedures. Despite all of this, the Art of Restoration was discussed more like a myth. Still, Druil remembered the first time he'd encountered it.

The man had come to him a while ago, an arm missing from the elbow down. It was a brutal wound from a lion attack and Druil had been able to save his life, but the arm was gone forever. The man had been depressed for days, finally heading out into the world to try and live without his appendage. It had been months before the man came back with a fresh arm, perfectly resembling his old one. There were no sutures or signs of medical procedure, yet Druil remembered suturing the bleeding stump where the lion had bitten clean through muscle and bone. Now, the arm was fresh and renewed. Druil decided he had to learn the technique.

Warm, golden-yellow candlelight danced across the pages of his journal as Druil recounted the event. He had fallen asleep at some point, but barely remembered closing his eyes. A new attendant knocked on his door, bringing a sampling of bread and fruits. "Great Healer Sorit must attend to three patients before performing the Art of Restoration. Once you have eaten, please join us down in the viewing theatre."

Druil fought the urge to rush through his breakfast, trying to convince himself that his speed wouldn't get through the three other appointments faster. After eating and getting dressed, Druil walked down to the viewing theatre.

Breakfast hadn't taken long, so Druil went to watch the Great Healer work. The medical theatre had a row of chairs on a small balcony grown a few feet over Sorit's work space from a bough of oak branches. A large chaise covered in moss stood in the center of the theatre, with a man stretched out on it. A small earthen table held a collection of simple

looking tools and a beautifully crafted wand of light-colored wood. A few shelves were within close reach of the healer, but they weren't arranged in such a way that Druil's view was blocked. Druil took a seat and leaned on the railing, watching Sorit as he consulted the man with a leg injury.

Great Healer Sorit tended to an elf-man's leg. There had been a laceration the cut into his thigh, but he showed no pain as the healer tended the cut. Healer Sorit gently applied a balm over the gash and Druil watched as the wound absorbed the cream knitted itself together again. Druil could see muscle pulling together over the cut and the blood vessels reaching out to one another. The skin stitched itself together last, only the faintest line revealing the healer's work.

When the work was done, Sorit stepped back and folded his hands behind him. The elf man stood and flexed the leg, checking for any signs of pain or discomfort. When he was satisfied, he bowed to the Great Healer silently. Healer Sorit bowed back and the pair parted ways silently. Another woman came in, green and sweating from some illness. Druil listened to her breathing and touched her wrist to check her pulse.

"How long have you been sick?" Sorit asked when he was finished taking vitals.

"Eight days," the elf woman said, dabbing her forehead with a cloth. "Fever and night chills...vomit in the morning and evenings, but most of the day I can stay strong. I fear my strength is waning."

Wordlessly, Great Healer Sorit walked over to a collection of vials and flasks. With indifferent precision and frightening speed, he snatched bottles off the table and racks. He poured a few into the same flask, stirring it constantly with a gentle turn of his wrist. Druil appreciated the concentration as the Great Healer swiftly concocted a potion as if he were

batting away a fly. Before Druil could discern half the ingredients, Sorit walked back to the elf woman with a slightly green elixir.

“Three tablespoons,” Sorit ordered. “Twice a day: morning and night. It will relieve the vomiting and night chills. Once you’ve had enough sleep, your body can begin to fight the fever at it’s source. If it hasn’t resolved by the end of the week, come back again.” The elf woman bowed, reverantly, and left.

Sorit walked to a small container of water to clean his hands. He looked up and noted Druil leaning over the rail with complete focus. “You work so quickly,” Druil said, “how can you determine the root of an illness that fast? Those symptoms could have been anything.”

“It was not the symptoms that told me,” Sorit explained, calmly drying his hands with a towel. “She had staining under her fingernails: an unmistakeable, earthy green. It comes from the Willow Wheat harvesting, they need to scrape the wheat off the trees by hand. The root of her illness is a parasite that comes from that plant, probably inhaled during the most recent harvest.”

“Then why not cure the parasite? Why tell her to come back?”

“The parasite has no interest in killing her. Once she’s strong enough for her body to fight back, the parasite will leave on it’s own.”

“But why not tell her?”

“She came for a cure for her symptoms,” Sorit said, a little sterner than usual. “The knowledge of her condition changes nothing for the treatment. If the parasite persists, then we will try a different medication. All she needs to know is that she will have her health back. Knowledge can do more harm than good.”

Another hour passed, Druil in silence while the Great Healer prepared for the Art of Restoration. The attendants brought Sorit a decanter of wine to drink and prepared his table of tools with care. The patient finally arrived.

He was a young elf with a missing right hand. His arm ended in a red, angry stump just before the bend in his elbow. His chest bore claw marks and he proudly displayed a tattoo of dark ink in the shape of a bear beneath it. The story was clear to Druil in an instant and Sorit ushered the young elf to his chaise.

Sorit studied the stump with a discerning eye, as if trying to find some obscure mark that would tell a different story. After a minute of study, he nodded and pulled his wand off the table. In the air, he scribbled out an incantation. Druil had used some simple magic in his work before, enough to know a spell to relieve pain when he saw it. A sense of calm passed over the young elf's face, his gaze focused on a point a thousand miles away and above the House of the Great Healer.

The wand twitched again, making runes in a language Druil did not know. The runes continued, flowing together like a child's scribble, but Sorit's control was absolute. The wand twitched downward and Druil saw his very first miracle.

First, a layer of bone to replace what had been lost. This seemed to grow rapidly from within the amputated limb, thick rods of ivory springing out of the flesh and taking on new shape. The radius and ulna bent inward gently, followed by a collection of smaller, more delicate bones for the hand and wrist.

Muscle followed, flowing down the length of the limb like water. The red fibers twisted and linked, braiding across the surface of bone and forming a musculature to match the elf hunter's other arm. Veins and arteries followed, thicker cords that were already filling with

blood from the man's steadily beating heart. Nerves followed, nearly invisible threads skating across the new muscle as the nervous system wound its way through to the fingers, making the twitch and flex for the very first time.

Lastly came the skin, sliding down like a sleeve from the shoulder to the tips of the new fingers. It matched the shade of the hunter's body perfectly as tiny freckles and arm hairs sprouted on the newly formed limb. As the last of the finger nails grew, Druil realized he had seen the impossible

From bones to fingernails and hair, the process had taken less time than Druil wagered it had taken for the bear to remove the arm in the first place. Sorit dismissed the gentle runes of light, waving them away like pipe smoke or insects, and the elf man stirred. Roused from his magically induced stupor, he raised the new hand to his face. Effortlessly, the hunter flexed and curled his fingers. With a neutral satisfaction, he bowed his head to the Great Healer and left without a word.

"It's a miracle," Druil said. "A task worthy of gods!"

"And now, you will learn," Sorit said. "We will begin with the inscription."

The following hours were spent with Druil's ink to paper. Sorit only taught him the shapes, repeating the actions so thoroughly that Druil's hand started to draw the runes unconsciously. It ended up being three lines of text. When he could write them—not only perfectly, but blindfolded—he was finally allowed to know the meaning of each abstract shape.

"By the binding of these words, the strength and form restored, the circle begins again," Sorit said, calmly saying each word like a prayer for last rites. His face was a mask of ivory as he spoke, but the slow blink seemed to betray some emotion. Druil couldn't identify the

emotion, but there was something there. Sorit blinked again, faster, as if pulling himself out of whatever emotional well he was teetering on the edge of. "We'll begin again tomorrow. Keep practicing. I have other patients to attend to."

The next morning, Druil was brought deep into the Great Healer's study. The healer's study was a combination of a library and conservatory. Books and scrolls covered a wall next to a large desk while potted plants lined the other faces of the room. Small cages containing insects, reptils and a few smaller mammals were stacked on top of one another in the central table of the room. A few different birds sat perched on hanging poles while others fluttered in and out of the room through the leafy ceiling. Sorit was at his desk, waiting patiently.

"You recall the runes from yesterday?"

"I slept with them burned into my eyelids," Druil bowed his head. "I practiced them long into the night."

"Good," Sorit nodded. "I hate repeating myself. We're going to attempt a restoration."

"Today?"

"Is that a problem? Yes, you will attempt the spell today. I would like to see your ability before we overworry about success and failures. If it's any consolation, we will start small."

Sorit walked towards one of the cages and reached into a leafy branch, coming back out with a light brown mouse in his hand. Druil watched the creature crawl around on Sorit's hand, one of her tiny legs missing. Sorit released the mouse onto the table, carefully cupping it in his hands.

"When you're ready, copy this sigil before beginning the incantation."

"Why didn't you teach me this line yesterday?"

“I will teach you why once you master the spell.” Sorit’s response was harsh and cold.
“This sigil first, then the incantation.”

Druil did as instructed, drawing the runic circle on the table with his wand. The mouse waited, limping around a little on her legs, but staying within the sigil. Druil took a deep breath and raised his hands. Like the conductor of an orchestra, Druil started drawing out the runes he had labored over the day before. He spoke the words as best he could, but nothing changed.

“Again,” Sorit said, when nothing happened.

Again, Druil was unsuccessful.

“Keep trying,” Sorit nodded, collecting one of his books from the table. “I will come back to check on your progress later.

Druil was focused, trying to stay on the humble side of confident. Still, the mouse was missing a leg. He had gotten close a few times. Once, he saw the glimmer of the spell starting to take effect, but his excitement broke his concentration. Another time, he was able to construct only the muscle of the mouse, somehow missing the bones first. His panic had turned the muscle into a pink gel that sloughed off like wet paper and he started again. Sorit returned after some time, but said nothing.

Druil took a deep breath and tried the spell again. He focused on the construction he’d seen yesterday, mentally superimposing Sorit’s own casting over his own work. The bones were smaller and delicate, but still the same basic structure from humerus to carpus. The muscles were a little more challenging, but Druil tried his best to construct it around the muscles. Tiny veins and arteries laced around the muscle, straining Druil’s concentration.

The skin grew down from the remaining stump, growing out tawny fur in a wave as the grasping paw flexed new muscles.

“We’ll continue tomorrow,” Sorit said, impassive. “Not bad for your first time.”

Druil was starting to feel a little frustrated by the situation. As he went back to his room, he studiously continued practicing the incantation. It felt like he was being strung along. He had accomplished a miracle today and the Great Healer barely even blinked. It was a mouse-sized miracle, but Druil felt it was still worthy of praise. Angrily, Druil sketched out the incantation again and again, his anger driving sleep from him until the sun rose early the next morning.

Sorit’s attendant summoned him to the Great Healer’s study. When Druil followed, Sorit dismissed the attendant with a cold wave of his hand. When they were alone, there was a true silence in the study. Compared to the gentle noises of nature the day prior, he felt an unnerving calm as all manner of critters still slept with their cages covered by small, silk cloths.

“You have done well,” Sorit said. “I am impressed with your progress. One casting does not make you a master. There is one last lesson to learn.”

“That’s it?” Druil asked. “Three lessons?”

“Yes. Three lessons and a lifetime of practice. For humans, it is a lack of time. For elves, it’s a question of dedication. For you, a mix of both. I am unsure. You have a true understanding of the technical aspects required.”

“And the last lesson?”

“Come.”

Together, Sorit and Druil walked through the House of the Great Healer, careful to avoid the eyes of other elves going about their business. In the viewing theatre, Sorit motioned Druil close to one of the leafy walls. With a wave of his hands, Sorit opened a gap between two of the tree trunk columns, revealing a staircase down into the earth. Sorit took up one of the candles and led Druil down.

In the cellar, stone walls encased them and echoed back Druil and Sorit's footsteps. After the warm embrace of the trees, the stone felt empty and cold. The candle lit their way down, but four torches rested in sconces on the walls on either side of the main chamber. The room was split by a wall of iron bars with no visible opening. Inside was a huddled shape, twisted into a small ball in the cell's corner. Chains rattled as he moved, but the figure made no attempt to speak to them. Druil turned to Sorit for an explanation, but the Great Healer only handed him the candle. Mustering his courage, Druil approached the cell.

The elf in the cell was horribly disfigured. Both of his arms were missing, his right up to the elbow and his left all the way up to the shoulder. His left leg was lost up to the hip and his other foot was missing. Only his right eye was in the socket, the left ear was missing, and the elf opened and closed his mouth, though there was no sound it could make besides a pained gargle. Swathes of his skin were missing, red and infected wounds covering his torso.

"What happened to him?" Druil asked.

"Look at the sigil around the edge of the cell."

Kneeling close to the floor, Druil studied the floor of the poor elf's cell. It was carefully etched into the stone deep enough that they wouldn't fade away. There was something familiar about it, but it was not for protection or security. The sigil had familiar runes, but

the only place Druil could think of seeing them was when he had traced out the sigil when he—

Druil stood quickly, dropping the candle at his feet and rounding on the Great Healer. Sorit sighed, though it may as well have been sobbing in Druil's eyes. "I cannot create a limb from nothing. It has to come from somewhere. The sigil in this cell connects to another in my viewing theatre. I'm afraid this poor soul is nearing the end of his usefulness to my craft. There is always—"

Rushing close and grabbing the Great Healer by his robes, Druil forced Sorit up against the walls. Their feet scraped against the stone, but Sorit showed no signs of discomfort beyond the shock of making impact with the wall. "He is a living being!"

"He is as much a monster as I am," Sorit said. "He was a murderer and a follower of a monstrous cult that was intent of destroying the Isle of Tribose. This was his punishment as deemed by a jury of—"

"This is torture!"

"Would it be better to waste his body? That magic you saw me work two days ago you called a miracle. Now, because you are aware of it's cost, it becomes cruel? It was always cruel, Druil. It is just a better use of cruelty."

"Do people know?"

"They believe he is dead, but he is more useful to society this way."

"Society? Does he even know what you're doing to him?"

"I imagine. I don't have time to come down here before each casting to relieve the pain."

"Animal!" Druil shouted, shoving Sorit hard against the wall and baring his teeth. "Do you feel nothing?"

“And that is the final test!” Sorit said, his calm voice edging towards rage with a raise in volume. “There is always a cost, Druil! Would you rather this murderer simply rot in the ground when his limbs can be used to save those who would use it better? The last lesson of the Art of Restoration requires a knowledge of sacrifice. You need to shut yourself off to it and focus on the good a sacrifice will do. When you begin using your own sigil of exchange, you’ll have to—”

“Using my own?” Druil scoffed. “You can’t be serious!”

“Without an exchange—something that magic can take to reform—you will never be able to use the Art of Restoration.”

“I would sooner die. I’m leaving.”

“Druil, don’t be—”

“No! I am leaving now. And I will never cast the Art of Restoration again, so long as I live!”

“Very well. Then I have only one last thing to ask of you.”

“Make it quick,” Druil said, unclenching his hands and setting the healer down. “My patience wares thin.”

“Tell no one of what you’ve seen here. Only a handful of people know and—”

“You plan to keep doing this?”

“For the greater good,” Sorit bowed his head. “I ask you, please, let me continue to heal people. You may not understand it, but the Art of Restoration is a tool that I use to save lives.”

Druil shook his head. “I won’t say it, but I won’t lie either. If anyone asks what I’ve seen I’ll tell them. No doubt, the news won’t reach your island.”

“That will have to do,” Sorit nodded. “You were—for what it’s worth—a very talented student. There are few who even make it to the last lesson.”

Druil left without another word, rushing up the staircase in near darkness.

It didn’t take long for him to pack his things and head to the front door of the Healer’s House. An attendant was waiting for him by the door, a small cage covered in a beautifully detailed silk covering. “A parting gift from Great Healer Sorit. He regrets he’s unable to give it to you himself, but he has important work to do.”

With a huff, Druil snatched the cage and carried it outside without speaking to the attendant. Any words coming from him right now would only harm the attendant and she had done nothing. She probably didn’t even know about the secret basement. Druil didn’t even acknowledge the cage until he was down at the docks, waiting for the captain of the Ember Wave to signal that they were ready to take on passengers. He sat on a bench and settled with the parcel on his lap.

Pulling back the cloth, Druil nearly wept. The mouse in the cage was missing one of her front legs, staggering around in a panic trying to find her way around the cage without the limb. Druil took a deep breath and set the mouse cage down on his lap. “There is such a thing as a cost too great,” Druil rasped to the mouse, “we’ll find a better way.”

The captain of the Ember Wave called passengers aboard and Druil prepared to leave the island behind.