

The Art of Restoration: Part 4

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.”