

First Scene from HAWKSPAR Posted

By Holly Lisle

This is the first bit of material not from Riknir's point of view that I've done. I'm pretty pleased with it. Note that it is pure unedited not-even-spell-checked first draft. It's subject to massive change in the future. For now, though, I think it sets up the MC's beginning conflict pretty well.

I had a name once.

My name was part of pictures in my mind tied to horses and to people who loved me. Many children, a tall smiling man who walked beside me as I sat astride a pony, a beautiful woman who held me in her arms and sang to me.

My name died in fire and blood. In the image of the people who loved me slaughtered, the children who were with me captured and bound and dragged into darkness.

In darkness I heard weeping, and prayer. I felt pain. The pain of chains around my ankles, around my neck. The pain of others around me dying, unheeded, untended, unmourned.

When I was reborn from darkness, I became Slave. I stood naked on an auction block in light that blinded me, and women from the Hermitage of the Oracle came to the slave market and examined my teeth and my hands and feet, and spoke to me, and when I did not understand their words, poked me with sticks until I walked. Something in me satisfied them, and money changed hands.

And Slave I remained. I carried water, scrubbed floors, washed cloths for the oracles and the sisters and the acolytes and

the penitents. Along with other girls, some who arrived and stayed, some who were sent away, and some who would eventually be chosen as penitents, I toiled from first light until last, and ate my meager meals, and slept on a mat on a dirt floor with dozens of others just like me. Evenings I studied with the rest of the slave girls at the feet of a succession of stone-eyed sisters who taught the lot of us morning and evening prayers, manners and courtesies, and the language of the Sry people. We were beaten terribly if ever we spoke a word of our own.

Words fall away if unused, and my name was nothing more than a word. I'd kept it hidden close to my heart, as I kept the images of the people who had loved me, but I never spoke my name, and no one else ever spoke it, and one day it was gone and I could not call it back.

I kept three words from the world I could not, would let go. Each day as the sun came over the horizon I stood to greet it and whispered "Haabudaf aveerzak," and I felt as if I was touching my lost family. As if they and everyone they had ever known reached out and embraced me. And as the sun set each night, on my way to whatever I was doing, I faced the last flash of light and whispered "Gitaada." And again, for just that instant, felt that I was loved.

These were my secret prayers.

Eventually the sisters chose me as a penitent, and then the senior penitent. I had more studies, less work. The stone-eyed sisters taught me the fighting style of the order, and the beginning magics that provided the foundations for the Oracle. I learned to recite the long histories word for word. I learned to recite the parables, and the examples. I learned well everything they taught me.

But penitents become sisters. Or, worse, oracles. And I wanted to be neither a sister nor an oracle.

So each evening after my chores, after my lessons, I cast a spell on the dirty water with which I washed my inner robes each night, calling to anyone who knew both "Haabudaf aveerzak" and "Gitaada," and I begged for rescue for myself, and for the other girls. Before it was too late. I took the water out to the cobblestoned courtyard that drained down the side of the mountain. Down over the cliffs around the Hermitage. Down to the sea. I sent my plea each night into the waters of the vast ocean, and each morning I looked to the sea for rescue.

None came.

Late last night the sisters came to me, as senior penitent, and told me that I would soon have a name.

Oracle Hawksparr is dying. The oracles have decreed that I am to be made an acolyte immediately, and begin the next level of training, and upon Oracle Hawksparr's death, I am to have her eyes. I will become Acolyte Hawksparr, and will upon completion of my training graduate to Oracle.

On the oracle's death, they told me I would be taken to the consecrated circle; I would complete the ritual of the Oracle Stones, which would bind me for life to the Oracular Eyes of Hawksparr. I would drink the sisters' potions, would fall into a trance, and the other oracles would remove my eyes and replace them with the two brown, gold-fleck stones that give the oracles their sight of the past, the present, and the future.

She is not much longer for the world, Oracle Hawksparr.

Another handful of days, the sisters say. Certainly no more than a month.

This morning I wept when I saw the sun, knowing I will not see it for much longer.

Tonight I prayed especially hard over my wash water. Bound my spell around it thrice, and thrice, and thrice again. A three of threes, which echoed of the wide fields and the bright houses and the tall men and women and strong horses that I once knew.

A three of threes. Magic not of this place, but of the one that came before.

I pled for rescue, and I still hold in my heart some hope that rescue will come. But now I can only fear that it will come too late.

I had a name once, and now I am to have a name again. But I would give anything to remain nameless, and in place of a name, to see the sun as it rises and sets, and watch the seasons change, and see only what is, and keep my tattered red broadcloth robes and my ordinary gray eyes.

I do not want to wear hawkspare eyes, polished brown crystal deep-flecked with gold; nor wear robes of brodered silk; nor have men bow at my feet as I pass.

I do not want that at all.

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