Friday Snippet—A piece of the rat scene from Hawkspar

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

This is a very short section of an enormous scene in HAWKSPAR, in which the heroine of the story, not yet Hawkspar, is being put on trial for the implied sins of her mentor.

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We reached the cage, and two of the leather-clad rat-keepers undid the heavy locks that would keep closed the iron gate.

I wanted to scream, "Don't put me in there!" I wanted to beg for rescue with everything in me. I did not.

Hawkspar had said, To the damned, courage is better than truth. She had sent that message to me at who knew what risk. I had done my best to interpret it. I had made my choice. I had chosen the path of courage—or madness—and it was too late to turn from it. Why, then, shame myself and Hawkspar before I had to? Screaming would not save me, would not change a single second of my fate. It would only offer comfort to those who wanted my death. They'd have their comfort soon enough, when the rats dropped onto me and began to gnaw. I'd scream enough to satisfy them then. The women fed to rats always did.

All I could do as the Onyxes slid me in and my bare skin touched rough, cold metal was close my eyes and pray. To

Jostfar, who did not know me, who was the god of a people who had once been mine.. I had been born Tonk, and I would die Tonk. And if I did not shame myself, perhaps my mother would know me as her daughter in whatever place or form in which we might exist after death was done with me.

When I lay with my knees jammed into my chest and my head barely inside the box, the door closed behind me, and I heard the sickening click of the padlocks.

The beating of the drums quickened their pace. All four ratkeepers marched to the cart, and each picked up four rat cages. They returned, set down three of their four cages at their feet, and placed the connectors over the openings that would lead into my cage. Each placed a hand on the lift-up door that would permit the rat inside to move from the back of his cage into the front portion that contained the connector.

The drums beat faster and faster, but never as quickly as my own heart. It hammered against my ribs as if trying to escape.

And then, at their peak, the drums abruptly fell silent.

Hawkspar's voice echoed throughout the arena. "On my command …"

I clenched my jaws closed, squeezed my eyes as tight as I could—as if those feeble attempts would keep the rats from my eyes or my tongue—and silently begged my mother to find me.
"… first rats now!" Hawkspar said, and I heard the scraping of four metal doors, and the squeaking grew to screeching as claws skittered down four metal tubes.

Four heavy bodies dropped onto me. Sharp points dug into my skin and scrabbled over me, and I felt cold, wet noses press against my flesh, and greasy fur sliding across my breasts and belly and face, and scaly, heavy tails draping along my

skin.

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