

Belated Friday Snippet: Hawkspar

written by Holly

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It's been a grim week. Got most of the writing done, but it's been hard. Snippet this week is from HAWKSPAR. Apologies for being so late with it.

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Before me stood Oracle Tower. Unlike the gray stone from which the rest of the Citadel—from walls to halls to temples to outbuildings—had been built, the founder of the Ossalene Rite had built that tower entirely of deep green volcanic glass, carved at the base to mimic vines climbing its surface, and farther up, to show the faces of men and women peering from between the vines.

The faces often seemed alive, and always seemed to be watching, peering down on us from their high vantage. I'd noticed more than once that they never seemed to be in the same place, either. I hated walking past Oracle Tower, nor could I think of a single slave or penitent I had ever known who did not. The air surrounding it tasted like pain and fear.

It is a part of the magic of the tower that only when someone who belongs within is present does it have doors. It is an otherwise-solid mass of glass—no army could force its way inside uninvited, for there would be no inside to the tower.

Nor could any who had no business there pass. The slaves and penitents have all heard this, as I had heard it. Yet I did not understand what that meant until the Obsidians pushed me forward.

"Touch the wall," one said.

I touched cool, smooth glass, and felt a vibration beneath my fingertips.

The glass curled away from me, shaping itself into an arching doorway. Light began to glow within the tower, and by it I could see stairs forming themselves in front of me, spiraling upward around the inside of smooth, glossy walls. I took a step back, frightened—the air that rolled out from the tower had a stink to it that drove like a spike straight into my brain. Something obscene waited inside the tower, and I would have offered anything to be spared walking through that arch or up those stairs.

One of the Obsidians behind me said, "We may not pass."

The other said, "I was instructed by the Oracle Hawksparr to give you a single piece of advice. Hawksparr said: To the damned, courage is better than truth."

I turned to stare at her. "What does that mean?"

"I could not say," she told me. "You'll have to discover its meaning on your own." And then she put her hand to the small of my back and shoved me forward. "Go. You are to wait until the Oracles join you. You would be well-advised to pray."

I stumbled through the arch just as the seru rang the bells of Basmam, third quarter of dark, and I felt the doorway suck itself shut behind me. I refrained from turning only out of sheer willpower; I knew if I saw there was no longer a door behind me, I would panic. I would run. In the faintly green-glowing darkness of Oracle Tower, I sensed that panic would

have consequences I could not imagine, and would not desire.

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