Friday comes early: Friday Snippet from THE RUBY KEY

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

I still feel like absolute death on moldy toast. This is more flu than cold, I think, and it's clobbering me hard.

But I'm up for the moment, and decided to go ahead and do the Friday Snippet early, then take the rest of the week off (or until such time as I actually feel like sitting up again).

So. This is from the revised version of **THE RUBY KEY** that went out to Lisa on Tuesday. A newly added bit, and something I really had fun with. It's not any sort of action scene—it's just a bit of description, but it's where Genna sees the nightling "barrow" for the first time.

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> *We reached a grand cavern after long walking; in our progress downward, we had passed dozens of passageways that led off from the spiral we traversed. I thought many nightlings might live in this one barrow—and then I got a good look at the cavern, and realized our little village had to sit within reach of one of the greatest and most powerful cities in all the world. And it was with the master of this city that vile Banris had made his bargain. I could only wonder where he had found the courage to bargain with such a creature. Or the courage to cheat him.*
>
> *We continued to follow the nightling who had led us into this*

place, but we followed wordlessly. Creatures winged and taloned that had never flown in daylight flitted and soared through the tall arched corridors, chasing fishes of the air and other creatures that I could have only thought at home in water. Squat, wide-mouthed monsters in every imaginable color—and dressed in velvets and brocades of the most beautiful workmanship—spoke in bell voices to men and women tall as willows and twice as graceful who furled and unfurled huge, delicate butterfly wings behind them. Nightlings with skin green or gold, pale lilac, vivid orange, snow white, ebony black, yellow or pink or richest royal blue moved through those same corridors, talking and laughing, followed always, always by black-cloaked, black-hooded silent attendants.

Nor were the exotic creatures and the even more fantastic nightlings the only wonders. Gardens grew along the way, trees curving and swaying, their leaves of gold and copper and ruby red; sweet-scented bushes brushed us as we passed; and flowers in every imaginable color glowed from beds planted by a master gardener with a genius for beauty.

Some faint music called us forward, almost impossible to hear, yet enchanting nonetheless.

I know the quiet beauty of apple blossoms in spring. I love the sweet awkwardness of newborn kids and lambs, the comfort of a cushioned rocking chair, the serenity of a shake roof on a rainy night, and of sturdy stone walls and a fire on the hearth come winter. These are good things, but simple.

The beauty and magic of Arrienda were extravagant, shocking, breathtaking … exhausting. My mind could not take everything in, and I wished I could sneak away for a short while and hide my eyes.

I wondered if humans had ever even imagined the possibilities I saw as finished works. I thought that if I stayed in this

place for one lifetime—or a dozen—I would never cease to wonder at the miracles that spread out before me.

But I could not let myself be seduced by beauty.

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