

Faces New and Old

a *Carnival Row* fanfic

by **Rodo**

for *blindmadness*

“COULD YOU PLEASE come into the foyer, girls?” Madame Moira called one morning while Tourmaline drew yet another portrait of yet another punter. It had become an obsession, she thought. She had half a box full already – young faces, old faces, handsome and ugly, staring at her from the page with hatred or longing, expecting her to solve whatever went wrong in their lives with her cunt. By Titania’s Grace, she hated leggers sometimes. She’d figured long ago that they were all the same, deep down, and coming to The Burgue and being confronted with all sorts of them hadn’t made her change that notion.

“What is it?” she called back when she’d reached the hall. Half the girls were already there, the other half were on the way and peering curiously down at the assembled crowd. The girls were arranged around Moira and two Burguishmen in a rough half moon. That did not bode well, she thought. With a flurry of wings she joined the others on the first floor.

One of the men, she could now see, wore a uniform with a badge on his helmet and on his breast. Definitely not good news then. She hadn’t been in The Burgue for long, but long enough to know that a Constable was never good news. The other one, though ... it took Tourmaline a few seconds to place him, since the last time she’d seen him, he’d had more hair and fewer scars. He’d also worn a uniform where now he wore a three-piece suit. But it was definitely him – Rycroft Philostrate – the Burguishman who for some inexplicable reason had managed to capture Vignette’s heart.

She must have been staring too hard, since a couple of moments later, his gaze locked onto Tourmaline’s and stayed there. For a moment, he seemed to struggle to place her too, then she saw his eyes widen slightly before his face settled back into the inscrutable mask he’d worn before.

After the last of the girls fluttered to the floor, Madame Moira clasped her

hands together and cleared her throat. “This morning, a dead man was found down by the river. He carried one of our match-books on him. Inspector Philostrate and Constable Berwick want to ask all of you a few questions,” she explained and nodded to the two men. “I hope you’ll do all you can to help them.”

Her request sounded sincere, Tourmaline thought, but Moira was an excellent actress. She just hoped she could honestly say she knew nothing and wouldn’t be forced to figure out whether lying might be in everyone’s best interest.

Philo – that’s what Vignette had called him, she now remembered – put on a non-threatening smile before speaking. “You can all go back to your rooms, if you wish. The Constable and I will come by to ask you our questions.”

Tourmaline looked around and exchanged a glance with Fleury, who shrugged. When she turned back to Moira, she nodded at them encouragingly, and so Tourmaline flew to the second floor and walked back to her room to resume her drawing. It didn’t take long until someone knocked on her door. She sighed in resignation when she saw Philo there, an apologetic smile on his face as he entered.

“So you’re alive then,” Tourmaline stated drily. “I suppose you were lucky.”

“I suppose,” Philo echoed and looked around the room for a while. The ensuing silence was unnerving.

“Why are you here?” Tourmaline asked sharply, and her pencil slipped.

“There’s a dead man—”

“Yes, I know that already. Ask your questions.”

Philo sighed and scratched the back of his head. “We’d like to know if the man might have been your client. He was tall, a little over—”

“Don’t bother with the description,” Tourmaline told him and pointed to the other chair. To his credit, Philo did as he was bid and didn’t try to argue as Burguismen usually did when a fae told them to do something. She held up the half-finished portrait and he just frowned at it, as if he didn’t know what to make of all of it.

“Is this him?” Tourmaline asked.

Philo shook his head.

“Well, then you can go through these,” she said, sliding the box over to him. “I draw them all. If he’s not in there, he wasn’t my client.”

He looked into the box and took the stack of pictures, looking at the first face, then the second. “Don’t you think drawing these might backfire, should

they ever find out? Most men don't like it if there's proof that they're visiting a faerie brothel."

"Well, I'm not going to tell them," Tourmaline shot back. "Are you?"

"No," Philo said, and kept leafing through the portraits. "You're good."

"I know," Tourmaline told him. Then she went back to working on her unfinished one. Somehow, it was harder to draw him with someone else sitting so close by, a Burguishman, especially.

"Why are you working here, then?" he asked, with badly faked casualness.

"Not much else I can do here, is there? Plus I don't have to deal with a human boss, and the pay is much better than in the factories."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him shrugging. "I can't argue with that," he admitted. "But the hair doesn't suit you."

Tourmaline snorted. "It doesn't suit anybody. But it's expected here. Carnival Row is supposed to be colourful."

She heard Philo sigh and flip through the pictures. For a bit, they both remained silent, focussed on their work, and Tourmaline wondered about all the things they didn't talk about. Oh, she *wanted* to talk about Vignette, wanted to ask all sorts of intimate questions. Why had she fallen for him, of all people? She knew Vignette better than anyone and she still had trouble wrapping her head around that one. He looked good, that much she could admit, and there was a sadness about him that was alluring, but other than that, he was a Burguishman. A nice one, as they went, but that didn't mean much. He was standoffish and uptight, just like the rest of them. Anyway, Tourmaline knew better than to ask these questions, just like he knew better than to ask her about her own past with Vignette. It was odd, having something in common with someone that also stood between you.

Finally, she heard him put the stack of portraits back into the box.

"Found him?"

"No," Philo said.

"Well, good luck with your search then," she said awkwardly. He was still sitting in the chair and stared into space. Tourmaline could imagine what he was thinking about, since she was sure she looked the same on occasion. Then he pulled himself back into the present and stood up with a sigh.

"It was good seeing you, Tourmaline."

"Was it?" she joked.

That teased a tiny smile out of him. “Take care of yourself.”

“You too,” she told him when he walked out of her room, ready to question the next girl. “As an Inspector, you probably need to more than me.”

He turned around and tipped his hat at her, then slipped away. The entire encounter had left Tourmaline strangely confused, and she wondered why while she put the finishing touches on her portrait. He was basically decent, she thought, and treated her like a human. That was what was so odd about him. Even the nicer humans tended to be patronizing, as if they were talking to a child or favoured pet. Not him. She wondered why that was, and if maybe that was what had drawn Vignette to him.

When she put the finished portrait in the box, Tourmaline wondered what to do next. Normally, she’d meet up with some of the other girls, or go out, but she didn’t feel like it today. She just stared at her white paper and pencil, and on a whim, she started sketching again. For once, it wasn’t the face of a stranger who had spent the night. Maybe it would help her figure out the mystery that was Rycroft Philostrate and why he won Vignette’s heart when she couldn’t.

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