

Battered, Not Broken

a *Warrior* (2019) fanfic

by **Rodo**

THE NEXT MORNING, Ah Sahm had promised. Now, as he hobbled up the stairs to Ah Toy's room, he regretted it. If he had said nothing, he could have stayed in his own room, nursing his wounds and relishing his well-earned victory. But he had said he'd check on her, and he was too worried not to. Plus, it was kind of his own damn fault. Going to the Irish bar to fight Leary had been an impulsive decision, brought on by frustration, anger, and the whole thing with Mai Ling and Young Jun. He'd needed to vent, and Leary had been the target promising the most satisfaction. One day, he'd have to get over his compulsive need to deal with his issues by punching people. But not today.

The room was bathed in light, for once. It made Ah Sahm pause. He'd only ever seen it with the curtains drawn, bathed in somber lamp- and candlelight. It had never really been bright enough to see the motifs in the pictures properly, nor the exact deep, dark shade of brown of the lacquered wood lattice. At night, the room was bathed in mystery. Now, it seemed inviting in a different way, reminding him of home.

"You looked better yesterday," Ah Toy drawled, one eye still swollen almost shut. But the one that she could open properly fixed him in that all-knowing way she carried about herself like a cloak.

"Yeah, well, you should see the other guy."

That drew a chuckle out of her that turned into a cough a couple of seconds later. It wasn't a bad one, though; there wasn't any blood and it didn't sound wet. Ah Sahm could just imagine how her ribs were holding up. Which only served to remind him of how his own leg felt. It hadn't been that bad last evening, he thought, when he'd dragged himself back to Chinatown. But now, the pain had settled into his muscles, and every minuscule movement hurt. When he gingerly moved towards the bed, he didn't lean on the pillows as he had last night, instead, he gracelessly let himself fall onto the mattress next to her with a groan of relief.

“Was it worth it?” Ah Toy asked.

Ah Sahn craned his head upwards – he’d landed with it at about the height of her chest – and nodded. “Yeah. I’m feeling better, and Leary deserved it.”

Ah Toy sighed. She’d told him what she thought of his reckless ways more than once. There was nothing left to say. Except Ah Toy was always good at finding things to say.

“What was it this time?”

Now it was Ah Sahn’s turn to sigh.

“Besides the obvious, I mean.”

“Isn’t the obvious enough?” Chinatown had been beaten within an inch of its life. People had died. Young Jun almost had. Just because the Irish couldn’t stop and think for one minute. Ah Sahn hadn’t know Jacob well – barely at all, really – but if he’d really killed the mayor, he’d had a damn good reason for it. That much he knew.

“If it was, you’d have gone immediately, or you’d have waited longer. Am I right?”

Ah Sahn stopped looking at her and stared at the canopy of the four-poster bed. “Mai Ling told Young Jun that I’m her brother.”

The ensuing silence weighed on him, making every breath feel like he was about to draw his last. This sword had hung over his neck for so long, he’d almost gotten used to it. Until other people realized it was there as well.

“I take it he didn’t take it too well?”

Ah Sahn shrugged. “He took it as well as he could.”

He heard Ah Toy’s head shake on her pillow. “He’ll come around. You’re his best friend. He loves you. And he never could hold a grudge very well when it comes to people he likes.”

Ah Sahn hoped she was right. He really didn’t want to lose his best friend, his brother. He’d lost a sister already. Outside, on the street, he could hear the people go about their business, cleaning up the wreckage of their shops, some even going back to selling their wares. It seemed their people were just like Ah Toy and Ah Sahn: battered, but not broken. They’d survived China, they’d survive this mess.

“So, you and the duck lady, huh?” he asked in an effort to lighten the mood.

Ah Toy huffed. “Do you disapprove?” she asked, voice dripping with humorous venom.

Ah Sahn had to laugh. “No. It’s just... an interesting choice.”

“It wasn’t really much of a choice. It just happened.”

“Isn’t that supposed to be my line?”

Ah Toy let her arm flop against his in what passed for a slap from someone this injured. She hit a bruise, so it actually hurt.

“She seems nice,” he said in lieu of an apology.

“Too nice, maybe.”

“For you?” He contorted himself to look at her again. She was staring at the ceiling, mind elsewhere. “I think you need someone nice in your life. It’ll help you soften up a little.”

Another weak hit, telling him to stop playing. “No. I think she deserves someone who is as nice as her. Not... someone like me.”

Ah Sahm couldn’t quite pin down what she meant when she said “someone like me.” A whore? A Chinese woman? A vigilante? “Maybe she doesn’t want nice,” he concluded. “She looked plenty into you and I only saw you together for a couple of moments.”

Ah Toy wasn’t convinced, it seemed. She still stared at the canopy as if it held the answers to all the questions beneath the sky. Ah Sahm went back to looking at it, but he only saw fabric and dustmotes dancing in the morning light. There were steps on the stairs, lively and crisp.

“Don’t put yourself down. If you really want it, you can make it work. You just have to care enough. My grandparents did, and it worked out for them in the end.”

“Sometimes,” she drawled, “you can be very naive.”

“Doesn’t mean I’m wrong.”

“Well,” a new voice interrupted, “I’ve been gone for just over an hour, but I could have sworn I only had one patient when I left.”

Above them stood the duck lady, still in her fancy evening dress and jewels, holding a tray with a carafe and a glass of water. Her eyes went from one to the other with a mixture of amusement and bemusement. Then she huffed and deposited the tray on the bedside table before taking a seat at Ah Toy’s other side.

“I’ll leave in a bit,” Ah Sahm promised. He was none too keen on being witness to all the gooey sweetness of fresh love he’d seen pouring off both of them yesterday. “I just have to pull myself together first.”

The duck lady – Nellie – looked at him with suspicion. He knew the look. He’d seen it on Penny once or twice. It was the look of a lady who had a lot of questions and too many manners to ask them outright.

“What happened to you?” she asked – apparently she didn’t have that many manners after all.

“I walked into a bar. They weren’t too keen on having me around.”

Beside him, Ah Toy rolled her good eye. “Don’t listen to him. He went looking for fight, and he got fight.”

“That’s one way to put it,” Ah Sahm agreed, albeit grudgingly.

Their bickering seemed to get Nellie to warm up to him, at least a little. There was only amusement dancing in her eyes now, and the corner of her mouth was quirking upwards.

“Then it is a good thing that you are here. The doctor agreed to come see you around noon. One more patient won’t hurt.”

That earned her a groan from both Ah Toy and Ah Sahn. “No doctor,” they both said, almost at the same time.

But that just seemed to amuse Nellie even more. “I can certainly see why you’re friends,” she told them.

And I can see why she likes you, Ah Sahn thought.

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