

# In Times of Hardship

a *Carnival Row* fanfic

for **River\_Song**

by **Rodo**

VIGNETTE STONEMOSS FELT tired to the bone when she finally climbed up to the flat she and Philo had shared ever since the bloody Burguishmen had locked every fae in the city into the Row. She'd been up running contraband through the sewers for Dahlia all night, and then she'd spent the day doling out some of the food to fae in need. The image of a destitute Afissa still hung in front of her eyes when she closed them. Of course Spurnrose hadn't bothered to get his Puck servant a work permit to leave the Row during the day; he was not the type of man to be loyal to those who were loyal to him. And now Afissa had to sleep on the streets when she'd done nothing to deserve any of this. Vignette curled her hands into fists and sighed deeply before continuing upwards, wishing she could fly. Her wings were the only part of her that didn't ache.

On the third floor landing, she heard a chair scrape across the floor of the flat. Philo was already home, then. That was unusual; he worked during the day, going where the rest of them couldn't. There were few half-bloods in the Row, and none could pass quite as well as he did. Those that could had done their damndest to stay in the city proper.

When she opened the door, she found him examining his face in front of the mirror that had once belonged to his mother, a bowl of water with a bloody rag on the rim in front of him. He looked worse than she felt. There was blood stuck in his hair and he held himself stiffly. But when he saw her, the frown on his face vanished and was replaced by a small smile.

"You're late," he said, leaning back in the chair.

"You're early," Vignette replied, trying to figure out his aches and pains just by looking at him.

Philo sighed. "It didn't go well today," he grumbled as Vignette walked over to him.

"I can see as much." She took the rag and cleaned it in the bowl, turning it pink, before carefully trying to clean his wound. It wasn't a bad one, even if it bled a lot. Wouldn't even leave a scar like the one on his cheek. But it was a head wound and those always looked terrible. Philo winced when she got to the cut itself, just above his hairline.

"Someone recognized me," he finally admitted. "One of the guys from the Constabulary. Threw his club after me when his gun jammed."

That wasn't everything, of course. It never was with Philo. And so Vignette continued cleaning his wound until the water was red, but his hair was mostly clean, if wet. Then she shrugged out of her jacket and placed it next to Philo's on the coat stand. In the meantime Philo stood up and staggered to the bed.

"That wasn't a club," Vignette pointed out when he let himself fall into the pillows face first, groaning.

"No," he admitted. "That was when I fell off a roof."

Vignette wanted to say so many things: she wanted to ask what he'd done on a roof, of all places, and how he had fallen off; she wanted to tell him not to climb onto any high places because unlike her, he didn't have wings, and she was always afraid he'd fall whenever she saw him do something like it. In the end, she just settled on sitting next to him and running her hands over his back, along his spine. Then she carefully rested them in the place his wings used to be. Her eyes glanced over to the wall, where the only memento left of them still hung.

"It wasn't a steep fall," Philo said, probably to reassure her. "I was running from George – the man who recognized me – and I figured I'd try to use the third dimension. Since apparently us groundlings only think in two. It didn't work too well, until I slipped on some mossy tiles after turning a corner. He ran right past me on the roof and didn't even think to glance down. It was only the one storey, but I twisted my back when I tried to break my fall."

Vignette sighed and pressed a kiss to the nape of his neck, which seemed to relax him a little. Then she motioned for him to turn on his back. Philo obliged, a question in his eyes, but she just shook her head with a smile. Neither of them was in any condition for *that*. Instead she carefully helped him out of his waistcoat and shirt so that he didn't twist his back any more. He still winced when she helped him lift his torso off the bed so that she could slide both off his

shoulders. Then he gratefully let himself fall back and stared at the ceiling until Vignette laid down beside him. His warm brown eyes settled on her and his hand grasped hers.

Vignette doubted either of them had eaten anything since at least the morning. Food was tight at the best of times, and in that moment, she was too tired to care much anyway. She wondered how they looked – half-dressed, messy from running about all day, tired from rarely getting the sleep they needed, too sore to do more than sleep – lying in a bed that suited neither of them in a room that was full of artefacts of a lonely life few had cared to mourn. Her eyes slid shut as she buried her face in Philo’s neck, and for a moment she saw Afissa’s desperate face again.

“At least I got the medicine back safely,” Philo said.

“It’s going to be harder now,” Vignette reminded him. “They all thought you were dead. Now that they know you’re not, they’ll look for you. You need to be more careful.”

She felt him nod against her, and the grip on her hand tightened. He would try to be, but they both knew that being careful couldn’t protect you from everything. This was their second war, even if there were no battles to be fought. And war was a familiar dread in the back of both of their minds.

*At least we won’t have to wage it alone,* Vignette thought as Philo’s even breaths lulled her into a dreamless sleep.

*Fin*