

Two Sons

a *Carnival Row* fanfic

by Rodo

THE DARKNESS WAS familiar. As were the scratchy hood above his head and the chains that secured his hands behind his back. Philo wanted to sigh, but he'd only just woken up and didn't know if there was anyone else in the room. Best not to give too much away. There was an odd sense of déjà-vu, though. It hadn't been that long ago that someone else had put a hood over his head, dragged him into some deserted room and tied him to a chair. It had all worked out then, but he doubted it would this time.

The last thing Philo remembered – before waking up who knows where – was that he had been on the Row. He'd walked through one of the alleys on his way back to what passed for home these days, and then, nothing. Only the vague memory of a sudden pain at the back of his head. But that might just be inference on his part – the back of his head still pulsed with dull pain. The bitter aftertaste on his tongue told him they hadn't relied on brute force to keep him out of it either. The only question now was, who was behind his abduction? He could narrow it down somewhat based simply on the fact that he wasn't dead yet. No robber would have bothered blindfolding and tying him up, and he didn't think Dahlia hated him quite enough to get creative when it came to getting rid of him. Which left... well, just about everyone else. Someone at the Constabulary, one of the leaders of the Row, you name it. Philo had always been bad at making friends, but the last year he'd outdone himself.

And so all he could do was wait. Wait and hope that Vignette was fine, wherever she was. It was unsettling, finding himself in this situation twice, and that was messing with his senses even more. He could swear the room sounded the same. Smelled the same. The only thing he could be reasonably sure about was that he was no longer in the city – he could hear birds, and leaves rustling in the wind. There were few places in The Burgue this quiet. And there were guards. Beyond a door, if he were to guess, a few feet away. He could hear them shuffle around sometimes, but neither of them spoke.

In the end, he didn't have to wait as long as he feared. If he were to guess, it took an hour at most until he could hear footsteps approach. Soon enough, it would all be over, whether Philo wanted it to be or not.

There were no words when the man (or woman) entered the room, but Philo could hear the guards retreating the way his captor had come from. Then the hood was pulled off his head.

The light was blinding. Which meant he had been out for quite a long while. Philo blinked against the light, and slowly but surely the world came back into focus. The man in front of him was young, younger than Philo, and rich. And someone he knew. When Philo cast his eyes about the room, he almost laughed. It had seemed familiar – because it was. The same dilapidated mantelpiece, the same peeling paint and boarded windows. Like father, like son, he supposed. But he wouldn't tell Jonah Breakspear that. For one, he hadn't been on Philo's list of people who might abduct him. An oversight, clearly, considering the man's mother.

"You're a hard man to find, did you know that, Mr. Philostrate?" his captor drawled.

Not hard enough, evidently, Philo thought. "Philo," he simply grunted.

"What?"

"Philo. Nobody calls me Mr. Philostrate." Portia had, but Philo liked to forget about that these days.

Jonah Breakspear snorted. Then he took a step back and took to stalking through the room like a bored cat.

"Do you know why you're here?" he finally asked.

Philo shrugged. Or tried to, as much as he could with his hands still securely tied. What he needed was time, he thought. And a way out of this mess, back to Vignette. Finally, Jonah Breakspear came to a halt, eyes focussed intensely on Philo's.

"Do you know who I am?"

An easy question. Philo nodded. He'd been involved in the police effort to save him when he was abducted, after all. There had been pictures handed to everyone in the Constabulary. And that was before he'd become Chancellor, his face plastered on the front page of every newspaper.

"And do you know who you are?"

Philo frowned. So this was about that. He had two choices: feign ignorance or admit the truth. Although considering what his mother had done, Philo doubted ignorance would save him. She could have easily let him live his life and he'd never have known. Instead, she'd come to kill him.

“Yes. Your father dragged me here as well.”

The look that flickered over Jonah Breakspear’s face was impossible to decipher. It contained so many multitudes, and was gone so quickly, Philo didn’t have a chance to gauge whether it had been the right answer or not. Then Jonah shook his head and took a deep breath.

“That doesn’t matter. You’re here because I have a question, and I think you’re the person to ask it to. What happened to my mother?”

The question felt like a blow. Philo had tried to forget that day. That monster. Had tried to forget the pain and the fear. And now it came back to haunt him.

“I don’t know. How should I?” Philo answered, but to no avail. Jonah Breakspear’s sardonic smile made it more than clear that he didn’t believe it.

“You do know,” he insisted, staring into Philo’s eyes. Philo stared back, knowing full well that a battle of wits wouldn’t save him. He was lost. But Vignette wasn’t.

“In my defence, she tried to kill me first,” he lied. Well, it wasn’t a lie per se. She had tried to kill Philo. Only Philo hadn’t killed her, but Jonah Breakspear didn’t need to know that.

“I know,” Jonah said. Then he repeated himself, quieter, more resigned this time. “I know.”

“It was self-defence,” Philo explained. “I don’t even know why she wanted me dead. I’m nobody.”

There was the sardonic smile again, the smile that said that there was more to this story than Philo knew. More than Philo wanted to know. And most importantly, more than Jonah Breakspear wanted to tell.

“Tell me where she – her body – is, and you can go.”

Philo laid his head to one side, judging the situation. He didn’t believe the promise, but what else could he do? And so he told Jonah where to find his mother, and what else he’d find as well. He didn’t seem surprised. Had he known what his mother had been up to a year ago? Or had he found out about it himself while searching for her? Either way, he took out a key, and opened the chains holding Philo, as he had promised. Their transaction was over, and that was that. Philo stood up, rubbing his wrists, and carefully made his way out of the room, wary of any surprises that might lurk in the corridor.

“We’re not brothers, you know,” Jonah Breakspear added when Philo was about to leave. “Don’t think I’m being sentimental when I’m letting you go.”

“I know,” Philo assured him. He’d been an orphan all his life, and he’d die as one. All half-bloods were orphans, whether their parents lived or not. Philo had no illusions as to the meaning of blood bonds between those like Jonah and those like him.

“Have a good day, Chancellor,” he said. Then he was gone.



A great man, Jonah thought, watching the empty chair. He hadn't seemed great. So much for his mother's prophecy. At least now he knew how to clean up the mess she'd left behind. In a few days, there would be no more traces of her laboratory, and he'd announce that his mother had passed while visiting relatives abroad. There were still the witnesses to deal with, but they'd stay quiet. The men who'd seen his father's liver knew the consequences breaking their silence would have for their cause. And Rycroft Philostrate – *Philo* – knew he would hang if he admitted he killed the wife of a chancellor. Nobody would listen to a half-blood who was suspected of murdering his own mother, especially if he sprouted crazy tales of monsters and magic. In the end, quiet witnesses were preferable to dead ones. People tended to ask questions when people ended up dead.

But still, it kept nagging at him. A great man. He'd been haunted by that promise so long, even if he never believed in it, never wanted it. Jonah knew he wasn't great, would never be. But there was this nagging feeling – his mother had tried to change his fate by killing his father's son. She should have succeeded. Maybe there was more to the half-blood than there seemed. Maybe he would one day be the greater man. If that was true, he'd be a threat to Jonah eventually. For one mad second, he wondered if he should try to kill him anyway. Then he remembered his mother's fate. If he was the greater man, Jonah was destined to fail. And if he wasn't, there was no need to kill him. Either way, Jonah had other problems to deal with: He'd only just won the election. And then there was Sophie... a half-brother who wasn't his half-brother was the least of his problems.

Let the man live his life. Jonah would live his own.

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