

Murder most foul

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/23560288) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/23560288>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Un Ballo in Maschera A Masked Ball - Verdi/Somma
Relationship:	Renato Count Anckarström/Riccardo Gustavo
Characters:	Amelia (Un Ballo In Maschera) , Renato Count Anckarström , Riccardo Gustavo
Additional Tags:	Swedish Setting , Dreams , Inspired by Novel
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-04-09 Words: 2,258 Chapters: 1/1

Murder most foul

by [Janus_my](#)

Summary

In a sense, after Gustavo died, he is not exactly alive anymore. He is, in a silent and dignified way, slowly marching towards his own end.

Notes

I certainly have mixed up names - this work is based on the Swedish setting yet I used Renato for convenience. Apologies in advance.

It is pretty obvious which cast I am basing this on - Dima you are dearly missed.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Everyone seems to be in mourning after their beloved king's funeral. Women wore black veils, while men held long silent vigils in memory of the sovereign. White candles were suddenly in short supply, as people prayed for King Gustavo's eternal peace in heaven throughout the night. Life went on, but at a completely different rhythm. The country was enmeshed in a stage of collective misery - No one slept for the first week after the king's passage.

No one but Renato. He fell into a deep slumber after the funeral, and remained in the coma-like state despite Amelia's effort trying to wake him. He was slightly feverish and murmured gibberish in a low, coarse voice. He turned frequently even in sleep, as if he was trying to fend off intruders and hold fast to something at the same time.

Renato was dreaming. Of nights long past and nights that will no longer come.

He dreamt about a full moon night. It was late summer in Stockholm. Gustavo and he had just left the opera house where they went for a play, dressing in plain clothes and disguising themselves as rugged foot soldiers. The play was another tragic love triangle turned sour - ending with the knight and his lover dying together but united in heaven under some twisted fate. Renato was never fond of such melodrama, while Gustavo was an avid fan of chevalier love tragedies and teased him for being such a standoffish killjoy. They are a duo of the taciturn philosopher and the golden equestrian, Gustavo insisted.

"And we shall never part again!" Said the golden equestrian to the tacit philosopher, reciting the last line of the play they saw. They walked side by side on the moon-lit path in the garden of royal palace, with their shadows stretching and overlapping into one. The two are one, and the one is two. "So long as I am the king, you will be by my side always! When my people think of me, your image will appear right along with me." Gustavo was clearly improvising to conjure a happier ending to the play.

Renato smiled and decided to play along this extemporizing recital with his king. "So long as you will have me, my eternal friend."

Gustav was not satisfied with this answer. He raised a perfect eyebrow, suggesting Renato could certainly do better than this. "Swear it! Swear that you will be my most loyal and dearest friend, that you will share with me one lifetime and one destiny. And never will you turn your back on me."

Gustav the fatalist, Renato sighed. But he put up his hand in the most solemn way he could think of. "I swear. I swear with the first breath I drew, the first tear I shed, the brilliance of the sun, and the memory of a bright moon." Under the velvet night sky he looked like he had walked down directly from the moon itself. Sharp features of his face were softened by the silver light, making him look almost like a gentle lover promising eternity even in the afterlife.

"Then I ask nothing else from you." Gustavo took his arm and ended their role-play game with a deep sigh. "Oh Rene, you can be a wonderful playwright!" They walked down the moon-lit path together, debating, laughing and shoving each other jokingly. The path was wide, bright and seemed never-ending. They were teeming with vigor and ease - they had their whole life ahead of them. The banging clock telling midnight did not disturb them at all. For they have another twelve thousand nights of the full moon, of companionship and love.

He let out a cry and woke up sweating. His face was damp - he was surprised to find there were tears on his face. He tried to get out of bed and open the bedroom window for some fresh air, and found himself staring at the bright moon. It was another full moon night. And he was again, thinking of the path they took together long ago. He still wanted to walk that path with his dearest friend, but he could no longer step on it anymore. There was no such path and no one to company him. He broke his own promise to Gustavo - his vow was made under the disguise of an improvising opera but was genuine in every word, for those who love would willingly share the same fate.

Fear overcame him when he thought Gustavo had betrayed him. For a fleeting moment he saw Gustavo leaving all what they have had behind and choosing to end their friendship in the most insulting and humiliating way. He had long known that Gustavo was fickle in nature - he flirted, had his casual pursuits and ephemeral affairs. But his king had always leaned on him, and never a second had Gustavo shown such an earnest passion in someone - Amelia! - other than him. This fear of loss and this cowardice of him turned to fury and hatred, and eventually led him to the worst of vices. The murder most foul.

And the sick fate laughed at him - Gustavo had never wronged him or betrayed their vow in any way. His king was the one who tried to keep the promise of never turnings against his friend. It was Renato who had stained and slain a pure soul. Even when Gustavo lay in blood on the marble floor, his face was peaceful, pure and radiant - a chaste and guileless smile on his lips - "I forgave you." Gustavo whispered to him, clutching Renato's hand as if there was no gaping wound on his chest and he was the doomed lover who died to his hearts' content.

Renato closed his eyes. Ever since then the moon was a harsh sight to him. Gone was the peaceful pearl - now he can only see a puddle of crimson.

Amelia came in to check on him. She must have heard the noise of him getting up. "Put on your gown, please. You are not well." She said in a worried voice. Renato stood by the window and didn't look at her. His eyes were blank - like a blind person, lifeless and lost. When he finally talked, he sounded like he was a thousand miles away.

"There was no murder. Nothing happened in the masked ball. Tell me, Amelia, I beseech you, there was no murder at all, was it?" His silver hair was messy from sleep, and even messier now as he was running his hand wildly through it. "Gustavo said he absolved everyone, for what? What have I done?" He suddenly started yelling fervently, cowering into the far corner of the room. "What is over there?" He put up his fist as if to defend himself, staring at a ray of moonlight fell on the floor. "It grows... It is closing in on me...It moans and trembles and growls... Go, go, I did not..." His face was that of an imploring beggar, seeking the slightest trace of consolation from the cruelest of fate.

Amelia was in tears. "Sleep, Renato. You shouldn't think about anything at this hour." She turned to cover her face. "I will get you some water. Please, rest. And leave all your doubts to tomorrow." Some questions were better left for the morning. Yet he kept asking them at night.

Renato crawled back into bed and drifted into the bottomless night. Long have he loved the moon, the time he spent with Gustavo under the moon and the future he imagined would come. But now he couldn't even find peace under the moon. Gustavo had died - the nights they had together faded away with him, like water dissolving into water. The stabbing pain from murder haunted him - a thousand tiny cuts, slight yet omnipresent, like fine grains of sand by the sea. Never will he forget the pain.

He slept and woke up again. This time not by nightmares but by hammering blows fallen on his ears. The sky was clear. It was the thunder of his own damnation he heard.

“Hear me, lord - You, ever merciful - smile on me, pity, have mercy on me, the sinner -” He broke down into tears. Those were tears of a coward, a traitor and a murderer who had to live on and lament in endless nights. He knew no god can save him - What is done cannot be undone, and he didn’t deserve mercy from anyone. But maybe he could find some way to have peace again. He would pay any price to keep his promise - to share one lifetime and one destiny with his king. His life even, if that’s what it takes.

But is it worthwhile to sacrifice all the full moons to come, for one past night under the moon? Renato heard some voices asking.

It is worth it. For that night of the full moon, he had things he did not tell Gustavo. And he would do everything to have that night back, to have the chance of walking side by side with his friend on the moon-lit path, to have the courage of telling Gustavo that he would share one destiny with the king without hesitance, as that is the burden of love.

The word of love scared him. It was like hot iron - he dared not to touch it, chose to hide it, and only to be driven mad by it. He stayed behind the disguise of friendship for too long, numbing himself by being a loyal companion, a confidant and a steadfast protector. Then the masked ball happened. And he was left here on this earth, forever trapped under the cold harsh moonlight.

The moon was almost gone now. He saw long grey fingers of dawn clutching at the fading star. Then he fell asleep again.

This time Renato was on a barren mountaintop. The night was again crimson like blood, but there was no wide path for him. The path he had shared with his king was full of peace and joy, the one he had longed for with his burning and dying heart. On the mountain he had seen million golden birds when the sun rises, with its golden mantle and diamond crown. He had seen clear noons with its fiery colors and evenings with string of pearls. Yet he rejoiced at nothing - he was cloaked by a mist of gloomy sorrow. He wanted only his king, the silver moon at midnight, and the path they had walked together. The night sky was brilliantly embellished with its starry mantle - if only he could see the moon again!

His hair was loosened by the wind. He recalled how Gustavo loved to mess around with his thick mane of silvery hair - tying it with blue ribbons and jokingly trying to embrace him from behind. He had put on his stoic facade then, lecturing Gustavo that the man who embraces too much can hold nothing fast. Now he realized that for his whole life, he had let

the thing he treasured most to slip through his fingers, and had even given it a death sentence. He murdered the man he holds the dearest.

In despair, Renato asked himself what he have had in this life, if he have had anything at all. Then he thought that he did have something once - just one thing - that full moon night in their youth. There was Gustavo. And that was all he had in this life, while the rest were just endless illusions. They were happy that night, not a thing to worry in the world. Renato thought that he could live like that in the years to come - they were masters of the universe! They could do anything, and the world belonged to them. But happiness knows no tomorrow; it doesn't even have a yesterday. It does not remember the past, and renders nothing for the future. Happiness only exists in one particular presence - not one day, but that single night.

Gustavo said he forgave Renato - so his king is still waiting for him somewhere, maybe on the moon itself. They are still as young as that night, full of devotion, passion and love. "You will share with me one lifetime and one destiny." Well, he had his life now, and should join his king, his friend and his love for the shared destiny he had promised. So he took a step from where he was standing on the mountain, into the void of night.

He wasn't falling. Instead, he heard a calling. "You are free - free - he is waiting for you." With this voice the bottomless night in front of him collapsed into the dark valley beneath, while the moon-lit path he had dreamt for so many nights appeared right ahead of him. The path was wide, extending directly onto the moon. He thought he saw his king: the friend he loved, the man he stabbed, and the only person in the world can offer him peace and solace. Gustavo was smiling. "And we shall never part again."

Renato tried to say something, to repent, to explain and to bare his soul. But his tongue seemed to have cleaved to the roof of his mouth, and his lips refused to move. He only gave out a loud cry - not much out of joy or sorrow, but out of relief long due - and ran towards his king on the path under the high moon.

And they shall live forever, as now it will always be midnight with the full moon.

End Notes

Thanks for reading! I am not writing in my native language so please point out any mistakes or wrong references.

This is inspired by novel The Master and Margarita. I have no idea why I still write about this fandom - Met's opera streaming has certainly brought back memories.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!