

Murder in Tassato

by Roderigo Lucas di Four Rivers

Dramatis Personae

Elisabet Scorrero di Tassato, The Bloody Beast.

Bishop Mario, a member of the Militia and Elisabet's lover

Bishop Benedict, a wealthy priest and a member of the Purifying Flame.

Tom Box, a foolish marcher.

Johan Swithland von Temeschwar, a wealthy naga merchant.

Calisti, a herald of Wise Rangara

A CHORUS of Tassatan city guard.



Scene : A public garden in Tassato Regario.

Enter Chorus, unseen.

CHORUS: Hear us now; and crown our words
with kind attentiveness all you who are assembled here,
whilst the traffic of this stage tells a tale both true and bloody!
Hear our words, and see here what unfolds.

In fair Tassato we lay our scene, a public garden here
that o'erlooks the Vassa and the banks of muddy Mestra.
Here, three conspirators will meet and plot a man's demise.
Here, darkened skies watch darkened deeds, while we,
the proud Militia of this fair city, watch all that happens and observe –
here, in this place, we will keep you safe, brave audience –
no matter how wet the work, The Laws will be done.

Enter Mario.

CHORUS: This man who enters here is our man, Bishop Mario,
a stately follower of Law, whose hand is steady for the work that he will bring.
He guises here to meet his co-conspirators, that we may snap the trap and take them in.

MARIO: (To the Audience.) Three months I've been a hunter of my quarry here,
three months we've crawled through crime like worms through apples.
The Purifying Flame my target – a group whose noble countenance belies an evil face.
The slaughter of the Lineaged is their aim, crude knives and shadow be their tools,
dark nights and crowded streets their escape. Three months I have hunted them,
and though my heart be strong and virtue-filled; tonight our final move be made.
I have shown them a false-face, all smiles and sycophancy –
I have parroted their words and vile oaths. Aye, me – even this!
Vile oaths I have sworn, on symbols of the virtues,
that I would see the realm-blood die. On symbols of the virtues!
What forgiveness could there be for this?

Who comes here?

Enter Benedict.

BENEDICT: It is I, Benedict. No fear.

MARIO: No fear have I. 'Twas merely a startle. You came alone?

BENEDICT: Alone, but for my will to see this work done,
which follows me like a brother.

MARIO: The Purifying Flame burns bright.

BENEDICT: This garden is a fitting place to meet.
The lines of tended arbours show our cause –
the flowers straight and strong, by skilful hands
are tended, the weeds – plucked out.
What think you, Mario?

MARIO: Methinks you do not speak of horticulture.

BENEDICT: 'Tis true. But where's our third?
I speak, of course, of her – your Elisabet, most beauteous and dark,
who kills so swift and sweet and bathes in blood to keep her skin so soft?

MARIO: Speak not that name! When here, a different face she wears.
Perhaps she guises here as Dr. Vasa, he who cuts out the rot;
Couros, mayhap – the Mountebank, or Leopold – the bloody beast,
prince of the shadows, whose cat-like smile the dark night cuts,
whose strong arm the pale throat cuts, who is the fiercest of us all.

BENEDICT: Must we suffer the scattered wits of this Actress –
the roles and masks she wears, the several vices that she holds to counter little virtues?

MARIO: I will not hear you speak of her thus.

BENEDICT: You are love-blind, Mario; and Love makes blind fools of us all.

MARIO: Cease – she comes.

BENEDICT: Who comes?

MARIO: It is Leopold whose face she wears tonight.

ENTER ELISABET, cloaked, masked and holding a blade.

ELISABET: What ho, brothers?

BENEDICT: Well met. Come you so ready? Cloaked against the night, blade drawn? Our time to work is near.

ELISABET: What work tonight?

MARIO: (aside) Here, tonight I will have them in my grasp. I'll hear their plan and hence I'll to the guard.

BENEDICT: A wealthy merchant visits here. A naga, by the name of Swithland ventures his arm in our fair city.

ELISABET: A naga? Foul sensate. Rattletongued viper, his heart be mine.
We'll clear these street of him and all his kind.

MARIO: What be the time to strike?

ELISABET: Midnight, 'ere the high bells strike.

BENEDICT: The place?

ELISABET: Here, in this garden. I will lure him hence.

BENEDICT: And I will meet you and add my blade to yours.

ELISABET: (To Mario) You too, my dark delight?

MARIO: Aye. My blade will join you. (Aside) I pray the guard be swift!

BENEDICT: 'Tis decided then. Strike the bells, strike in hate. A bloody death tonight be Swithlands fate.

EXEUNT ALLS

CHORUS: See now, our man is drawn to dark deeds, as we predicted. We'll see it through.

Scene 2 – The Garden

ENTER TOM BOX, carrying an apple.

TOM: Great Tassato! City of a thousand splendid things!
For several months have I walked, on several feet
and worn out several pairs of shoes to get here.
My home is Meade – Tom Box, fair Marcher-born am I,
and Highborn and Freeborn can weep to see the fruits of our labour,
but here I hear great deeds are done; and so here come I, to bring them this –
(Shows the apple.)
This is my great deed, a bright sun rising over the fields; and a day of toil.
Here, in Regario, I am told they will appreciate my great deed.
– What garden be this, so well-tended? It is no Marcher field.

ENTER CALISTI

CALISTI: Hold fast and stay, Tom Box – I know your name and I have use of you.

TOM: What foul monster be this?

CALISTI: No monster, sirrah, but a Herald of the Winter Wise – from fair Rangara I am sent.

TOM: The Crone?

CALISTI: Call her not Crone thou foolish clod-pate.

Call her thus again and thy flapping tongue I'll loose from it's moorings.

TOM: Forgive me! I tremble to hear your words! I beg you please –

The Ancient One, I'll know her as, Eldest, Grandmother Winter, Kind Rangara.

If I were Kallaves then Pale Raven she would be,

from old Varushka, Clever Spider I would call her.

For all these things she is and more.

I am but foolish – I'll not speak such insult again.

CALISTI: T'will suffice.

TOM: What brings you here, Messenger of Winter born?

CALISTI: A curse I must see fixed. A bloody deed done. I am witness to the passage of this time, as are you.

TOM: A bloody deed? How my blood runs cold! I tremble at the thought!

CALISTI: And yet it happens here as it happens elsewhere.

I smell the blood on every breath this city takes.

TOM: Are all cities so bloody?

CALISTI: Aye, and all towns and spires, all halls and vales and chapterhouses –

and all other places too – save one, and that one I'll let you guess.

TOM: My foolish pate has no space for Herald's riddles. What occurs?

CALISTI: Watch. Midnight approaches. *(They Hide)*

Enter Johan, bearing a lantern.

JOHAN: Tassato! Painted mistress! It is no Temeschwar, of course, but t'will suffice.

Here, in this garden, I am called to meet an actress of great beauty who has business for me.

TOM: (Whispers) Who is that?

CALISTI: (Whispers) T'is Johan Swithland, a merchant in salt fish. He visits here to ply his trade. He dies tonight.

TOM: (Whispers) Should we not warn him?

CALISTI: (Whispers) Hush, child. His fate be sealed.

TOM: (Whispers) Fate? T'is no virtue.

CALISTI: (Whispers) Be silent! You are no part of this. His tale will be told. Your role comes later.

JOHAN: T'is silent here, and darkened. Perhaps the actress fair has other things in mind?

She is a beauty, it is said, a strange and rare delight is she

and all the Empire's stages she has graced, her Princely face is famous.

Once in Sarvos, at a humble theatre she played Gancio and

'tis said the coins of men and women flooded to that stage like water

knowing this, and hearing her invite to this quiet garden,

what brave spirit could be content to sit in his shop,

with a flappet of wood and a blue apron before him,

selling hake and hempen cloth, that might pursue great feats of love,

and through his noble achievements, procure such a famous history

to be sung of his heroic prowess? – I swear, by Vigilance, t'is a dark place to do business.

Enter Benedict, Mario and Elisabet, holding blades.

ELISABET: T'will suffice for the work we have in mind.

JOHAN: How now, sweet actress – one word with you I pray,

why brings you these two, all three with blades drawn,

for what reason come you thus in anger? Have I wronged you?

A grudge, to family or Carta that I know not –

Madam, I pray thee – say your piece that we may make amends.

BENEDICT: (Aside) Sibilant suffering fool, your blood will taint this world no more.

(*To Johan*) I ask you this: How serve you the Way?

JOHAN: The Way? I had not asked for priests. O

We were to meet in this garden, Elisabet and I, here for business – I had hoped for pleasure too–

ELISABET: Pleasure? You, with me? Foul viper, you'll pleasure none. Your rattle I'll cut off.

JOHAN: Sweet mercy!

BENEDICT: Mercy is no virtue. Strike, bells, strike now!

MARIO: Where are the guards? I bid them here and now. Where tarry they?

(Bells ring. Benedict seizes Johan.)

BENEDICT: Strike, friends, the bells strike. Strike, Mario! Elisabet, strike now!

(Mario and Elisabet strike. Johan dies.)

MARIO: Virtues save me!

ELISABET: Sweet blood, water these streets and wet these fingers. Let me taste you!

Enter CHORUS

CHORUS: Halt! In the name of we who witness all, what happened here?

BENEDICT: Mercy, a great crime happened here.

A band of cut-throat Freeborn happened here, a band of foul orcs happened here!

MARIO: 'Tis lies – and lies it is – the man who lies there

is slain by villains of the Purifying Flame

– arrest those two! For I am Mario of the Militia,

and I would see these villains face the block!

ELISBET: Thou false-faced wretch!

CALISTI: Speak now, Fool, of what you have seen!

TOM: (Aloud) Villains *three* I saw – three villains saw that man laid low!

BENEDICT: What spyglass be this?

TOM: I saw it all. Mine own eyes witness here –

the merchantman was murdered foul by those three hands –

one to hold him fast and these two to draw the bitter blades.

For I am a Marcher-born, my eyes are bright and saw it all did I.

CALISTI: 'Tis done.

CHORUS: Kneel, villains, three; and hear you the wisdom of the Law.

(Benedict, Mario and Elisabet all kneel.)

MARIO: Clemency! A virtuous hand moved me.

CHORUS: No Virtues called for this. Be silent. You are our man no more.

ELISABET: And mine you'll never be.

CHORUS: Silence, all!

CHORUS: (To Benedict) What have you gained by thee but infamy?

Thou hast stained the spotless honour of this place,

And frightened thence noble society:

Like those which, sick o' th' palsy, and retain

Ill-scenting foxes 'bout them, are still shunned

By those of choicer nostrils. And you, Mario,

No virtuous clemency can stay the judges' hand –

In this, your palms be stained with gore, be likened to your comrades here.

And you, Elisabet, if all the world would be your stage, then you would see it burn

A conflagration that consumes all but the strongest souls, iron-hearted and iron-blooded

There is no virtue here. You will hence, away from this place, to see you punish-ed

The axe will be your final lover, her last kiss on your throat.

And you, fair Audience, you who witness all tonight, know this.

That though your crimes be great or little all will come to light

For Lawful hands will wield the strongest blade

By Lawful hands the Empire's will is made.

END