

Another Unnecessary Death
inspired by *Duel After a Masked Ball* by Jean Leon Gerome
by Tia D. Miller

“You cannot have her!” Anger flushed Severn’s face as he drew his sword. His passion brought tears to his eyes, but he blinked them away and focused on D’Angelo’s countenance.

D’Angelo’s own rapier sliced out of its sheath. His fingers wrapped lightly around the hilt, caressing its tempered bronze. He did not wish to fight the trembling young man before him. Severn was the spoiled son of a nobleman, accustomed to delicate sweets, fine wines, and tailored clothes of rich fabrics. He had no sense for the refinement of a sword or the dedication of its art. Even now, his pale skin, untroubled by sun or wind, was nearly indistinguishable from the powdered makeup of his clown’s attire. This was not a man D’Angelo could fight, not without killing. He did not need another unnecessary death on his conscience.

“Please sir,” D’Angelo asked quietly, “do not do this.”

Severn looked around at the small crowd that had gathered, their costumed revelries intrigued by this unpleasantness. D’Angelo saw the war in Severn’s mind in the twitch on his face. Severn knew he could not win, but he could not back down now without sacrificing his pride.

D’Angelo tried again. “I have done you no wrong. Leave now and keep your life.”

Instead of placating, the words seemed to inflame Severn even more and he lunged foolishly with his sword. D’Angelo easily sidestepped the attack. Severn spun around. “You stole Cassandra’s love.”



“She gave it willingly and without encouragement.”

Severn lunged again; again D’Angelo did nothing more than block the blade. “You sullied her reputation. You had your way with her last night and tonight you ignore her as though she didn’t even exist.”

This time the attack came from D’Angelo. Severn’s sword bent with his feeble attempt to counter. D’Angelo was tired of this banter. “I have taken advantage of no one. I have only ever treated all women with the respect they are due. If your fiancée chooses to spend her evenings with another man, then perhaps you should be more concerned that are not satisfying her needs. Perhaps you should be more concerned that *you* are not treating her with the respect she is due.”

D’Angelo saw Severn’s face widen into rage. He made his final attack. It was sloppy, fueled solely by anger, exactly what D’Angelo was waiting for. He parried the thrust, and with the dagger he’d kept hidden in his other hand, tore through Severn’s snow white costume and skin.

Severn’s face registered shock, then realization. He stumbled backward into the waiting arms of the bystanders. A doctor, who had traded his coat for the robes of a priest that night, probed the wound as Severn’s only boldness, the color of his deep red blood, spilled out of his chest. The doctor looked up and shook his head. Severn’s last breath shook and rattled in his lungs.

On the steps above the courtyard, Cassandra picked up her skirts and maneuvered her way down to D’Angelo’s side. She glanced once at Severn, then placed a delicate hand on D’Angelo’s arm. “Come back inside. I have missed your company.”