

## Under the Order

By Ryan Crouch

*Spotlight on a squire in Victorian dress*

Squire: Under the order that we perceive as our reality lies a chaos more real than anything we can see or touch or smell. Upon this chaos is built our entire existence, our family, society, and selves are mere paper walls to this shaky foundation. Subject to its every whim.

*The spotlight goes off, lights up three people on thrones that rest on a platform upstage. Below them a feast is being held, although it is frozen. Each one; Love, Hate, and Death sit on thrones. These thrones are decorated according to their characters, as are their costumes. There are stairs that lead from the stage to this platform. Death separates Love and Hate. Whenever one of these three interrupt the regular humans, they stand up, and the humans freeze.*

Hate: (obviously bored) These romantic tales you weave are boring. *Real* stories should not end in smiles and celebration.

Love: Wait wait! Let them have this one moment. Just one second of pure joy, it's only right.

Hate: Fine, as you wish, but give me some time with them later.

*Love waves his statement away. The feast resumes, and Amaro, the prince stands up. He rings his glass and everyone stops talking and looks at him.*

Amaro: I would like to speak a few words to the beautiful lady Thana.

*Hate sighs. Thana, the lady sitting next to Amaro stands up and nods at the gathering.*

10,000 days I've walked this Earth, and if I were to go to my grave at this moment I'd lie in the dirt happy in the knowledge that my existence has been justified by your presence. Although, I suppose I am going to push my luck with one simple question.

*He gets on one knee and holds up the ring.*

With my brother, Linus, as my witness,

Love: (interrupting) Thana, the only living being who truly fills the whole of my soul, The only person whom I hope to truly know,

Amaro: Will you marry me?

*The feast freezes. Hate gags from his throne.*

Hate: I feel as if I am drowning in sickly sap.

Love: (annoyed) And you would rather drown in blood?

Hate: (exasperated) A million times yes!

*Death, who has been watching all the happenings around him, stands up.*

Death: You forget one thing.

Love: What is it now?

Death: That none of this (he gestures at the feast) really matters. That none of these emotions, be it love, hate, anger, or fear last longer than a single lifetime. They never fail to wash up against the one true universal constant; to drown beneath dark waves of dirt and rot.

Love: Why must you always criticize us? Let us have our fun while it lasts. If our “petty feelings” are of no consequence, then why do you waste your time on interrupting us so?

*Death steps down the stairs.*

Death: Because I am intrigued.

*He steps between Linus and Amaro and puts his arms on their shoulders.*

These two, they have potential.

Hate: What kind of potential?

*Death steps back from the two men.*

What is the point of telling a story if your audience already knows its ending?

Hate: (impatiently): Just get on with it.

*As Death sits back down in his seat, he pats Hate on the knee.*

Don't you worry, by the end of this story, you shall have had your fill.

*After Death sits down, the feast resumes.*

Thana: (overjoyed): Yes! With the Gods and the men and the stars and the Earth as mine, I say yes!

*Amaro stands up and puts the ring on her finger and kisses her. All the feasters cheer and drink to the marriage. Amaro waits for them to stop before he continues, he pulls a flintlock pistol out from his belt, Hate sits up, excited, but slouches back down when Amaro flips it around and offers it to Thana.*

Amaro: Then, here, as a gift from my family to yours. The pistol that my great-grandfather loaded, with the full intent to fire it into the head of his great nemesis, but before he pulled the trigger, he saw the pain in the man's eyes. The inner product of forty years of hardship and sacrifice about to come to a violent end. And in those eyes he found the need to let the man live. Let it represent the endless compassion that I have for you, Thana. And pray that its trigger may never be pulled.

*Thana delicately takes the gun and arm-in-arm with Amaro walks off the stage, leaving the feast. Linus sits down and starts drinking and while they all laugh, he sits there sad. One the men turns to Linus*

Feaster 1: (drunkenly) Aye, Linus when is that you are going to find a woman to whom you can give your ring?

*They all laugh. Another one turns and speaks to him.*

Feaster 2: (Also drunkenly) As if any woman would accept it?

*They all laugh even harder. Linus stands up. He walks in front of tables, the men behind him go back to their talking and laughing.*

Linus: (sadly) They poke fun, yet their every word bites just a little bit more out of my soul until I fear there is nothing left.

Hate: (continuing Linus's sentence, Linous freezes as death talks) And then there is Amaro, a portrait of perfection, a real hero, they say. His whole life must be visible to him as a map is visible to a navigator, all planned out to go exactly the way he has set it out to be

Linous: and yet I feel as if mine is but a path that splits dozens of times, only for all the branches to end up in the same bleak ending. Not a single word has he muttered to my detriment, not a single blow has he dealt upon me, and yet it is with a strong feeling of anger I look upon him every day. I feel as if mine is an equation that only the Gods can solve.

Feaster 1: (shouting) Hey Linus, why must you pout, there is much wine and few mouths!

*Linus sighs and walks off-stage. The lights turn off, except for those on the three thrones.*

Hate: (slightly more interested, to Death) The scent of blood is growing strong, I sense some... Excitement

in the near future of our Linous and Amaro. (Death smirks and shrugs, not giving anything away)

Love: (bored) Let me guess, Linus, the underdog, somehow gets Thana to realize that she really loves him, and not his brother, causing her to leave Amaro and take Linous to go live happily-ever-after.

Death: (shaking his head) My my you have a narrow mind. Do you really believe that I would spend so much effort on a tale of such low consequence, as if "happily-ever-after" is the end goal of existence. The only ever anyone will ever get is forty, maybe fifty rotations on this speck of dust before they, just like everyone before, or after them, lay down for the real ending to their tragedy.

*The lights come back on, revealing the feast, but without anybody there. The tables are covering in dishes. Linus slowly comes back onstage, he sits at one of the benches and puts his head down, after a little bit he sits up.*

Linus: (melancholily) I do not know what about these passing events that has affected me so. It seems that happiness without brings sadness within. Everywhere I see people that are smiling, laughing, in full knowledge of how little they matter, and I cannot fathom it. It seems that no matter what I do, my only destiny is to be forgotten about. In two hundred years, who will remember my name, who will feel the effects of my life. What about in five hundred? A thousand? Two?

*Death steps down from his throne and steps next to Linus, surprised, he stands up.*

Death: There is much more to life than you imagine, if it is true, that this lifetime is all we've got, then why waste it on complaining on how little we have.

Linus: Who are you?

Death: Does it matter? I will leave and you will never see me again, except reflected in the eyes of those you love as they watch you die. And then it will matter even less.

Linus: What do you want?

Death: To give *you* what *you* want.

Linus: But I don't even know what I want!

Death: Then let me tell you. As far as I can tell, both of your problems hold the same solution. You crave for meaning, for your actions to have a consequence. You worry that nobody will ever know who you are, that after your death, you will disappear into the darkness of time, never to be thought of again, just another person who changed little and accomplished less. You also feel great animosity towards your brother. Both of these problems can be solved with the same action.

Linus: (curious) And what is that?

Death: You'd be amazed the power that the squeezing of one's index finger could wield.

*Linus looks down at his hands and squeezes his index finger like he is pulling the trigger on a gun. Suddenly realizing what Death is saying to him he looks up.*

Linus: You cannot possibly be suggesting that I-

Death: It is entirely up to you to interpret what I am suggesting. Just know that there is just as much meaning to be found in the act of destruction as in the act of creation.

Linus: (angrily): I could have you killed for... You could be hanging from the walls... For even thinking such a thing.

*He hesitates before saying more and looks down, furiously walking offstage confused and muttering. Death grins and goes back up the stairs to his throne.*

Love: Only a real narcissist includes himself in his own tale.

Death laughs.

*Lights fade.*

*They come back on on one side of the stage where Linus paces back and forth, debating furiously with himself.*

Linus: I fear that the seed planted by that crazy half-wit has rooted too deep.

Hate: (interrupting) For I cannot not forget it, no matter the situation. And yet the wedding only gets closer, the representation of all those things I resent about other people.

Linous: There is a path for everyone, and to shorten someone else's, but what does it matter, they will reach the end, they won't care, they can't feel anything. (convincing himself) So in a way it's, worth it, to trade the infinite numbness of one to get rid of the infinite pain of another. And it only seems fair. He has lived a whole life of satisfaction... Of meaning, and never given me a moment of it.

*He pauses, decided.*

As to how to accomplish it. A knife would work just as well as anything, although, to get close enough to him at the right time would be uncertain. He has named his squire as his ring-bearer, so there is no excuse that I have. (He pauses) It appears that the twitch of the index finger will have to do the trick... My great-grandfather's pistol, kept in my brother's room, seemingly a symbol of empathy, if you were to trust Amaro's speech, will be used as a tool for the opposite.

*He walks with deliberation off stage. The lights go off on that side of the stage and go on on the opposite, revealing Amaro, overwhelmed with joy.*

Amaro: Every moment that passes brings the big moment closer. (he claps his hands together) In a way I wish that I had asked later, so that this interminable wait would not be so long. I feel a swelling in my chest. If it does not subside soon, I fear that I will burst. But it is a good thing, I suppose, a reminder to myself that *she* is the only thing that can complete me. Well it seems that I will have to last a few more days.

*Lights dim.*

*When they come back on, the wedding is in action. Amaro and Thana are walking down the aisle. They stop at the edge of the stage. The priest lines are done by a narrator offstage.*

Priest: And do you Prince Amaro, take the lady Thana, to be your lawfully wedded wife?

Amaro: I do.

Priest: And do you Lady Thana, take Prince Amaro, to be your lawfully wedded husband?

Thana: I do.

Priest: Ringbearer, present the ring.

*The ring bearer (squire) stands up from the front of the row of the people attending the wedding, as he is walking the pillow over to the couple when Linus also stands up and pulls the gun out, almost putting it dramatically up against the back of Amaro's head, the people attending the wedding gasp. The squire sees this and pushes Amaro down right before the trigger gets pulled. The shot goes off and Thana drops dead on the ground. Linus drops the gun and runs offstage. Amaro screams and pushes the squire out of the way to get to her he holds her in his arms. The scene freezes.*

Love: You have a wonderful way of ruining things that others take so long to construct.

Death: It is the most decorative buildings that have the weakest foundations.

*The scene starts again. Amaro puts the body down and slowly stands up, crying. He slowly walks through the people, who part to let him through, he sits at the bench and looks at Thana's body, next to the gun on the stage. They leave one by one as he looks at the body, leaving him alone at what remains of the wedding.*

Amaro: To say that this is a tragedy would be utterly and completely wrong. To call this an accident would be an outright lie. There is only one responsible, the one that I have affectionately called my brother for the last twenty seven years. He who has removed all meaning and point from my existence. There is no space on this planet that is deserving enough to hold such a demon shrouded in human skin. *(realizing what he has to do, he walks towards the flintlock pistol and picks it up)* And so I will make sure that no place shall be forced to. *(to squire)* Squire! *(He freezes)*

Hate: Your seeds are finally beginning to bear fruit.

Love: So depressing, tell a happy story for once.

*Death waves there comments by.*

*The squire runs onstage.*

Squire: You called for me sir?

Amaro: If there is a ever a moment that I have needed you it is now. *(slowly growing angrier)* He has taken the meaning from my life and replaced it with himself, and for that he will pay, find him and capture him. *(yelling)* I want his heart beating so I may stop it myself, his eyes still lit with that petty fire that he calls a soul so I may extinguish it... His evil will be undone upon himself!

*The squire nods and leaves Amaro turns and grabs a horn of powder from the table and proceeds to load the pistol slowly and maliciously.*

Amaro: To think that I trusted that slug of a human, that his presence has been felt in mine and I did nothing to stop it. Before I dreamt only of love and romance, but now the images in my head are of death and murder. What has this fool done to me, with a tug of his finger he ended one life, and poisoned that of another? It is both my daydream and nightmare to give this man the abrupt ending he felt the need to deal upon others for no reason beyond the petty.

*The squire runs onstage.*

Squire: Sir, we have found him, riding a stolen horse into the king's forest. We have subdued him. What is your next command?

*Amaro stands up, loaded gun in hand, he grins maliciously.*

Amaro: Bring him here, so that his blood may spill on the same spot as his innocent victim.

*A group of people, the same as those at the wedding drag Linus onto the stage and throw him down at the foot of the stairs, his hands are tied behind his back. He stands up and hangs his head.*

Amaro: Come forward you filth.

*He drags Linus forwards through the group of people that part in the same way that the wedding aisle was parted, with the same people on either side (He puts him in the same spot that Amaro had stood at the wedding, and stands behind him in the same way that Linus stood when he put the gun to Amaro's head. He grins and puts the gun to Linus's head) His hand shakes as he holds the gun, eventually he puts it down.*

Amaro: Thana died on her feet at the very moment that should have been the happiest of her life.  
You should not get the same dignity.

*(He kicks Linus in the back of the legs so that he falls to his knees. He points the gun to his head again and again pauses before letting the gun down, and looking at it)*

The story of the this weapon begins with a man who chose not to use it out of compassion for his enemy. *(he puts it back up to Linus' head)* Now I choose not use it for the opposite reason. *(he puts it down again)* For you, my brother, a fate ended by a bullet traveling faster than the eye can see is much undeserving. *(To guests)* Leave us! *(he waves the "guests" away and they all leave)*

Amaro: *(turning back to Linus)* What motivated your crime is beyond my knowledge and my caring, what is done is done and can't be undone, such is the wicked way that time marches forward. The only thing under our control is what is about to come. And trust me when I say this; for you there is no uncertainty moving forward.

*He pulls Linus onto his back violently and kneels on him, pinning him down, facing away from the audience as he pulls out a knife tucked into the back of his belt and slits his throat. When he is done he sighs and stands up, standing over the body of his brother. For a second he is happy.*

Amaro: Finally some justice in an unjust world. *(Saddening, turns back to anger as he talks)* But what is justice if not satisfying the biased need we feel to seek revenge against others for the actions they do to us? And if this is truly revenge, why am I not satisfied. For a second, the hole left by Thana's absence filled, but the sediment seems to have washed away, leaving me just as empty as before, there must be only one answer, the hole is dug by my heart of hearts, who knows that the *real* culprit is still out there, waiting to be added to the pile that slowly mounts at my feet.

Amaro: You!

*Realizing who the "real" culprit is, he turns and runs up the stairs dragging Death off his throne and down them by his lapel and casting him down at his feet. He picks up the gun and levels it at Death's head.*

You are the one who ripped the meaning from this cruel and chaotic existence.

*There is a pause before Death starts laughing.*

Death: *(As he talks he goes from laughing to serious; angry):* Do you *really* believe that you can, with a twitch of the finger, end the chaos that rules your world? That you can take the reigns of your reality and control them at your slightest whim, mastering it like so many have failed to do before? You must be *truly* arrogant. *(he stands up)* Your universe isn't totally chaotic, for a truly chaotic existence would be a cloud of hot gas constantly spinning around itself. There *is* an order,

deeper and far more true than you can ever understand. And suppose you did end me, right here and right now. That hole in your heart that you speak of, would that be filled? Would you walk away satisfied, never to harm a fly again? Or would find someone else to blame? Perhaps the squire that pushed you out of the way, forcing Thana to take your bullet? Perhaps your father for giving you the gun in the first place? You would have a pile of bodies that reached the stars before that hole was filled with a grain of your soul's dirt. And in your moment of blazing passion, of killing, raw and powerful, did you ever consider why you were doing such a thing? What spark lit the fire? The answer is far more trivial than you would ever lower yourself to expect. You grovel in the dirt and play your stupid games without even looking up to realize who pulls your strings. Who twitches the finger on the trigger, connects the eyes of two in the glance that leads to love. You are nothing more than a plaything. A puppet who dances when yanked. Your entire existence exists because *I want it to*. It's *fun* to watch you fools walk and talk and live and die. Linus shot at you because I thought it would be interesting, it was me who made the bullet miss, who allowed your brother to be found, who put that gun in your hands. And now you suppose to kill *me* to fill your meaningless hole. Let me tell you something, that hole will *never* be filled, and there is nothing. Nothing! you can do about it.

Amaro drops the gun to the floor and slowly walks away, head hanging.

Death turns to Love and Hate still on their thrones and bows while they slow clap.

The end.