

THE MURDER  
OF GONZAGO

*Also by R. T. Raichev*

The Hunt for Sonya Dufrette  
The Death of Corinne  
Assassins at Ospreys  
The Little Victim  
The Curious Incident at Claridge's  
Murder at the Villa Byzantine

# THE MURDER OF GONZAGO

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For Imogen  
'Tis the sharpness of her mind that gives the  
edge to my pains!  
In appreciation and with much love.



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'All is not well;  
I doubt some foul play.'  
*Hamlet, Act I scene ii*

'One mustn't refuse the unusual, if it is offered to one.'  
*Agatha Christie, Passenger to Frankfurt*



## Prologue

# Death in a Hot Climate

Three minutes passed before they realized he was dead and another two before it was established how he had died, though any suspicious observer might have argued that at least one of the five people in the room had been aware of both facts all along.

‘Don’t go near him,’ Dr Sylvester-Sale said, removing the cardboard crown from his head.

‘Stop filming. I am talking to you, Augustine. Get the bloody camera out of the way at once!’ As Clarissa Remnant raised her hand, her bracelet in the shape of a coiled serpent glinted ominously.

‘But – how is that possible?’ Basil Hunter said. ‘Are you – are you sure, SS?’

‘Positive.’

‘Why are you still filming, Augustine? Are you out of your mind? Didn’t you hear what I said?’ Clarissa Remnant’s eyes flashed. Her crown was still on her head.

‘We must turn the music off,’ Louise Hunter said. ‘We really must.’

But nobody did. The scratchy LP continued to revolve on the ancient wind-up gramophone with its huge brass horn, and ‘The Bilbao Song’ was followed by ‘Le Roi d’Aquitaine’.

The door opened and a middle-aged woman in glasses entered the room. 'It's so hot – I am afraid I felt faint – I don't think the air-conditioning system is working properly, is it?' She sounded breathless.

She stood peering at the body on the couch. 'Is Lord Remnant unwell?'

'He is dead,' Basil Hunter said.

'Would one of you take the camera from Augustine? The man is a complete idiot, or else he's doing it on purpose!' There was something terrifying about Clarissa's white make-up and lips the colour of old blood.

'Dead? But how dreadful,' Hortense Tilling whispered.

'The little beast,' Dr Sylvester-Sale said. He was looking in the direction of the french windows. 'He did it after all. He said he would – and he did.'

'I don't think you should jump to conclusions, Syl,' Clarissa said.

It was perhaps unfortunate that it was to Hortense Tilling, Clarissa's aunt, that Augustine handed the camera.

'Oh dear. Is this the right way to hold it? It's not upside down, is it? I'm terribly sorry but I'm hopeless with cameras,' Hortense moaned. 'Perfectly hopeless.'

Having been very pale, her face was flushed now. She was frightened but also excited. Her thoughts were confused. Dead – Lord Remnant was no more – it wasn't dreadful at all – one always said things one didn't mean – the beast was dead – destroyed at last – *questo è il fin di chi fa mal* – this is the end of evildoers – there should be singing and dancing in the streets – the death of those who do evil is always the same as their lives!

*Don Giovanni* was her favourite opera.

'I have no idea how this thing works,' she said. 'No idea at all.'

'It doesn't matter how it works. Really, Aunt Hortense! *Just turn the bloody thing off.*' Clarissa Remnant sounded at the end of her tether.

'We must call an ambulance,' Louise Hunter said.

'I don't think that would be much use,' Clarissa said.

'The police – we *must* call the police. It would be wrong if we didn't call the police. We'd be breaking the law.'

'Shut up, Louise,' Clarissa said. 'Just shut up.'

The next moment she turned and left the room.

Renée Glover was the only one who hadn't uttered a word. Clarissa wasn't going to call the police. Of course not. Clarissa would come up with a plan. Basil Hunter would go along with anything Clarissa said, of that Renée had no doubt. So would Syl. Old Hortense was still struggling with the camera. Louise Hunter seemed larger than ever and she had an outraged expression on her face. Renée tried to catch Dr Sylvester-Sale's eye and failed. They'd agreed to be careful, but surely they could look at each other when Clarissa was not about?

The silk curtains were drawn across the french windows and they stirred slightly. Was that the evening breeze – or was someone standing there?

Renée walked up to the curtains and pulled them apart sharply. She didn't believe the killer would be outside.

Behind the net curtains the windows gaped wide open.

Renée Glover walked out through the french windows and glanced round the terrace. No one. The warm Caribbean night closed in on her. The stars shone with fierce brilliancy – was that Canopus? The full moon above the palm trees had a purplish tinge. Only an hour previously she had stood on this very spot, admiring the crimson-streaked sunset and listening to the surf and the mournful cries of seagulls . . .

All was quiet now. There was not a breath of wind, just a wonderful balminess in the air. The only sound was that of the insects, a kind of low, steady hiss produced by the

rubbing together of thousands of gossamer wings. A moth brushed lightly against her face.

She gazed into the night, at the great avenue of spreading palms thick with shadows, at the harbour lights in the distance. Odd, that she was not at all afraid. Suddenly she heard a tiny splashing noise close by, then another. Stephan? He liked sitting beside the pool, dropping in pebbles.

Her nostrils twitched as they caught a whiff of something she thought was familiar. *Very* familiar. But it belonged to a different place – it belonged to London – to Belgrave Square—

Moonlight lay in knife-shaped patterns on the terrace. She took a step to the left and stumbled over something—

A monstrous head with preternaturally long ears leered up at her.

The head was made of papier-mâché. A gleaming object lay beside it. *Two* gleaming objects. Renée glanced over her shoulder, then stooping, she quickly picked up the smaller of the two objects and put it in her pocket.

It had taken her exactly three seconds to realize what the smaller object was and to whom it belonged. Had she been right about the smell then?

A moment later the others joined her on the terrace. Someone gasped—

Renée Glover's expression didn't change. She prided herself on being able to exercise perfect control over her emotions.

## Before the Funeral

In St John's Wood Lady Grylls was talking to her butler.

She was not wild about going to Roderick Remnant's funeral, she wasn't in any way *obliged*, she was merely a cousin twice removed, but there was nothing better to do at the moment, so would Provost have the goodness to get her hat out? Her *funeral* hat, she added, not her wedding one. The two hats were strangely similar and no one would notice, so perhaps it didn't really matter, though of course one liked to do the right thing.

And could she have another glass of sherry? She didn't think the hat needed cleaning, or dusting, for that matter. She had worn it only the other week, for Caroline Heppenstall's funeral. Caroline had been a mere seventy-two. These days Lady Grylls went to more funerals and memorial services than weddings. Most of her friends' grandchildren were already married and some of the *great*-grandchildren too, now wasn't that extraordinary? Made one feel positively ancient.

'But don't misunderstand me, Provost, I am not in the least depressed. Not a bit of it. I am now quite used to funerals. Well, I'll be eighty-two this year, so that's perhaps how it should be. How many funerals do you think I have attended so far?'

'This year, m'lady?'

'No. In my entire life.'

'I couldn't say, m'lady.'

'Come on. Have a guess.'

'A thousand, m'lady? Two thousand?'

'Don't be silly, Provost. Twenty-eight. One day I sat down and calculated. My doctor keeps telling me I need to exercise the old cerebellum, otherwise it will simply stop functioning. I may have omitted one or two, mind.' She took a sip of sherry. 'I will go to Roderick's funeral, but I don't think I will attend his memorial service. *If* there is a memorial service. I cannot imagine anything in Roderick's life that deserves to be celebrated as such. I have an idea he won't be much mourned.'

'Perhaps not, m'lady, but it will be some time before Lord Remnant is forgotten.'

'Roderick's personality may have been more forcefully colourful than those of the bland and timid masses, but one does tend to forget people the moment they stop coming to dinner, Provost. Certain people one even forgets *during* dinner. It's most disconcerting. You look across the table and you wonder, who the hell *is* that? You don't think I am suffering from Old Timer's, do you?'

'Old Timer's, m'lady?'

'That's what Mary Gaunt calls it, awfully funny. You know what I mean – the brain-melting disease. I seem to have forgotten its name, which is a bad enough sign.'

'I don't think you are suffering from Alzheimer's, m'lady,' Provost said.

Lady Grylls took another sip of sherry. She had known Roderick Remnant's first wife, the tragic Deirdre, rather well. Deirdre had been at school with one of Lady Grylls's younger cousins. Lady Grylls didn't care much for Roderick Remnant's *second* wife, who was the widow now. She had been younger than him, though no spring chicken, on the



wrong side of forty, or so Lady Grylls believed, though forty-five was considered 'young' these days. 'What was her name now?'

'Clarissa, m'lady. Née Vuillaumy.'

Lady Grylls cupped her ear. '*Villainy?* How terribly interesting. Suggestive, wouldn't you say? Clarissa is apparently one of those women who don't improve with age, only learn new ways of misbehaving themselves. She has a son, but he is not Roderick's son.'

'Lady Remnant has a son from a previous marriage, m'lady. The young man's name is Stephan Farrar.'

'Stephan, that's right. I understand he takes drugs. Same as your boy used to do, only worse, much worse, I think. Gerard Fenwick is Roderick's only brother. I used to be great chums with Felicity Fenwick's mama. Gerard will be – what?'

'The thirteenth earl. According to Debrett's.'

'It seems to me you know too much about the aristocracy, Provost, it's positively unhealthy. You need to get yourself a girlfriend. Gerard writes, or tries to. Everybody nowadays seems terribly keen on becoming a writer. Can't understand it myself. My niece-in-law writes detective stories, though she says her advances are staggeringly small. Felicity dabbles in interior decorating and sells furniture, I believe.'

'The new Lady Remnant has a shop in South Kensington, m'lady.'

'The extraordinary things you know, Provost. You should be on *Mastermind*. The Fenwicks are frightfully nice. As it happens, Hugh's got his eye on Felicity's Damascus chest, so it's a small world. I have an idea neither Felicity nor Gerard cares for Roderick's island. What *was* the island called? There was a TV documentary about it. Somewhere in the Caribbean.'

'The Grenadin Island. One of the Valance group. Previously known as the St Philippe group.'

‘What fun that documentary was. I believe we watched it together, Provost, didn’t we? It made Roderick look quite mad. That high-pitched giggle! Those snow-white pyjamas! Never took them off. Had *fifteen pairs*, he said. Boasted about it. Would *you* boast about it if you had fifteen pairs of snow-white pyjamas, Provost?’

‘No, m’lady.’

‘The way he strutted about, fanning himself! He looked a bit like Alec Guinness playing Lawrence of the Caribbean in an Ealing comedy.’

‘It was not the most flattering of representations, m’lady.’

‘Far from it. Well, Roderick had only himself to blame, though I don’t think he was the sort of man who blamed himself for anything. The camera made a big thing of his outsize sombrero, his temper tantrums and his fan. How did he explain the fan now?’

‘Lord Remnant said that in another existence he must have been a geisha, m’lady.’

‘*The Grenadier of Grenadin*. That’s what the documentary was called, I believe? No doubt a reference to the fact that Roderick had been in the Guards as a young man. But why did they call it a *meta*-documentary? Have you any idea?’

‘I am afraid I haven’t, m’lady.’

‘I must say Roderick behaved terribly badly. At one point the camera showed him waving money at what was said to be a transvestite prostitute. He then kicked the documentary director in the shin and hit him on the head with his fan! Remember, Provost?’

‘I do remember, m’lady.’

‘That poor chap! It looked as though he was going to cry. Roderick said he had many abilities including irritability. That was terribly funny, though of course one could see what an impossible character he was.’

‘Lord Remnant gave every appearance of enjoying himself. He talked about his profligate lifestyle with considerable relish.’

Lord Remnant had boasted of spending forty million pounds on buying and developing property and throwing parties. He had admitted to blowing ten thousand on a special kind of tent which had been hand-made in Ceylon and delivered to Grenadin by helicopter.

'Back in the seventies those parties were considered the epitome of glitz and glamour, Provost. Or what in the seventies passed for glitz and glamour. Roderick became known as the Jet Set Monarch. He was always photographed wearing a crown . . . I believe he was interested in witchcraft as well?'

'Lord Remnant dabbled in voodoo or hoodoo, m'lady. Apparently he attempted to resurrect the dead.'

'His idea of a party trick, I suppose. Well, it seems to be the right part of the world for that sort of thing.'

Provost cleared his throat. 'Lord Remnant and his family were said to be under a curse, m'lady. It has been claimed that he built La Sorcière on top of a piece of West Indian holy ground, which he should never have done.'

'The curse, yes. It all comes back to me now. Well, I don't know. It's true that Remnants have had all sorts of problems. Roderick never had any children. Poor wretched Deirdre became a kleptomaniac following her menopause, then she hanged herself most inexplicably. They say Clarissa has had as many lovers as there are Chinamen in China. I am sure you know all about Clarissa's lovers, Provost?'

'I am afraid not, m'lady,' Provost said after a little pause.

'The stepson is a drug fiend and he's got a screw loose. Roderick has now died at the comparatively young age of sixty-eight and the title has passed to his younger brother who is a compulsive scribbler, though he can't get anything published.'

'Most distinguished families are said to have a curse. The Sassoons, the Tennants, the Kennedys, the Grimaldis—'

'Sometimes, Provost, I wonder if a curse is not just a handy way of excusing generations of self-indulgence and general bad behaviour.'

‘Certain members of the Royal Family used to be regular visitors at La Sorcière, but then they suddenly and for no apparent reason stopped going.’

‘Is that to be blamed on the curse as well?’ Lady Grylls appeared amused. ‘You don’t have to speak of the Royal Family in such hushed tones, Provost. Ridiculous. I don’t suppose you still pray for the Royal Family, do you? You do? Goodness. Remnant parties were the stuff of legend. One had to be terribly amusing or good-looking or fascinating or outrageous to get an invitation to a Remnant party. Not any longer, it seems. Still, they appear to have been getting up to all sorts of silly things. The latest craze – there was something about it in the *Mail*. What was it? Miltonesque litanies?’

‘Shakespearean capers, my lady.’

‘Sounds like the kind of thing that would drive me mad. Who was the ugly character in Shakespeare who lived on an island?’

‘Caliban, m’lady.’

‘Are you sure, Provost? I thought the Caliban was a somewhat extreme Afghan nationalist movement.’

‘That’s the Taliban, m’lady.’

‘I wonder if the stepson will be at the funeral. The stepson is subject to sudden and intense disorientation, or so they say. His head, apparently, poses great problems for the medical brains of Harley Street. They keep sending him to some terribly expensive place, but then he comes back and the whole thing starts all over again. He hates his stepfather. *Hated*, one should say. I understand he threatened to kill him on a great number of occasions.’

## Conversation Piece

'Do correct me if I am wrong, my dear, but you seem to be enhaloeing the name La Sorcière with a whole new morbid aura,' said the former Gerard Fenwick, now the thirteenth Earl Remnant.

'I am certain they are all involved in some way, the whole Sorcière set. Clarissa and Glover and Miss Tilling and Dr Sylvester-Sale,' Felicity Fenwick said. '*And* the Hunters. The Sorcière Six, as the press may well dub them one day. On the analogy of the Tapas Seven.'

'Can't imagine the Hunters being involved in anything.'

'They all had a guilty air about them. They looked conspiratorial. They kept exchanging furtive glances. Don't tell me you didn't notice.'

'I'm afraid I didn't.' The new Lord Remnant crossed over to the drinks trolley and poured himself a whisky. 'No one is at their best at funerals. I thought they looked subdued and terribly pale and pinched, but then didn't we all?'

'You couldn't look pale even if you tried.'

It was the kind of cutting remark that made Gerard Fenwick wonder about the state of their marriage. Better pretend he hadn't heard.

He raised the whisky glass to his lips. 'That was an embarrassing little scene, wasn't it? Never imagined

Tradewell was an emotional chap. Falling to his knees – praying in that booming voice, with his hands clasped above his head. *Sobbing.*

‘I am sure Tradewell was crying for himself. His fate is a bit uncertain now.’

‘Tradewell’s an oxymoron. *An emotional butler.* But you may be right. Don’t suppose Clarissa cares much for Tradewell. I know he “goes” with the house, but we may not need him either.’

‘We don’t *have* to live at Remnant, do we?’

‘We’ll be expected to put in an appearance every now and then. *Noblesse oblige* and all that sort of rot.’

Gerard Fenwick stood beside the window, nursing his drink, gazing at the sky, which was a gash of crimson and orange. His thoughts turned to Renée Glover. The way she had smiled at him – *such* a sweet smile. Renée was genuinely interested in his writing . . .

Felicity said, ‘No second thoughts about starting the – what is it you wanted to call it? Dilettanti Drag?’

‘Dilettanti Droug. Was that meant to be funny? It will be a small but rather exclusive press,’ he said stiffly. She doesn’t understand me, he thought. She doesn’t understand me at all.

‘Oh yes. *Droug* is Russian for “fiend”, I keep forgetting.’

‘It’s Russian for “friend”. There is a difference, you know.’ Felicity was doing it on purpose, he was convinced of it. She was trying to get at him. ‘No, no second thoughts, my dear. No reason why I should have changed my mind, is there?’

‘Clarissa says she’ll move to La Sorcière permanently. Grenadin clearly agrees with her.’

‘Clearly. It doesn’t agree with me. Thank God we only got invited once. So hot – and all those mosquitoes! I don’t suppose we were their sort of people. We don’t seem to scintillate.’

‘I wouldn’t have said the Hunters scintillated exactly. Louise Hunter is so fat. The Hunters lack – what is it they lack? A significant *something.*’

'Charm? Unity? An edge?'

'That's it. No edge.' Felicity nodded. 'I have known beach balls with more edge to them than the Hunters.'

'I believe they are frightfully mismatched. Louise is dire, I agree, but I don't think there's anything really wrong with Hunter.'

'I don't suppose I could ever like Louise Hunter, not even if she were to save me from drowning or death by fire.'

'I feel sorry for Hunter. He is a first-class farmer. I wouldn't be able to do half the jobs he does. He *understands* cattle . . . When was it we saw my brother on the box? Was it last year or the year before?'

'Last year – you mean that ghastly documentary, don't you?'

'Yes. It was ghastly, wasn't it? Roderick's teeth didn't seem to fit and he never for a moment took off that ludicrous hat. He seemed peculiarly rejuvenated, didn't you think?'

'People always look different on the box,' Felicity said dismissively. 'Would you get me a Scotch, Gerard? With plenty of soda.' Kicking off her shoes, she sat on the sofa. 'I am chilled to the bone. Hate funerals. The trawl from Remnant Regis to the crematorium was unbearable. It's a miracle I survived.'

'I know exactly what you mean. I feel as stiff as a varnished eel myself.'

'And that vicar, how he droned on! I didn't feel a flicker of spiritual devotion, not a flicker, only a vague kind of annoyance. I can't imagine your brother being in heaven now playing the harp – can you?'

'I don't think the vicar said anything about a harp, did he? It would have been unscriptural.'

'I *hate* the idea of an afterlife. The shocking insecurity of it all – the spectacular lack of privacy – bumping into people you'd hoped never to see again or wondering why so-and-so was not there! It would be my idea of hell.'

‘Plenty of soda, did you say? Wise girl. Here you are, my dear.’ He handed her a glass. I am not sure I like having drinks with my wife, he thought. I used to, but I no longer do. And she is wrong if she expects me to start discussing my religious beliefs with her. ‘Chin-chin, my dear.’

‘Chin-chin . . . The moment the coffin disappeared into the furnace, the Sorcière Six all looked immensely relieved. Why *did* they look so relieved?’

‘Scotch and soda is my favourite drink,’ he said. ‘No question about it. Next to frozen Daiquiris.’

‘Clarissa was wearing all her pearls and all her diamonds, which was certainly *de trop*, and *such* a theatrical little hat. To start with, her face was a studied Madonna Dolorosa, but then it began to crumple—’

‘You don’t think Clarissa loved Roderick?’

‘Don’t be ridiculous.’

‘Clarissa is the vogueish vamp type. In profile she brings to mind Madame Sarkozy.’

‘Clarissa is so overloaded with sex, it sparkles. She reminds me of one of those golden striped things that roam the jungle . . . It’s perfectly obvious she’s had an affair with the doctor, which he has now ended.’ Felicity put down her glass. ‘What do we know about your brother’s death, Gerard? How exactly did he die?’

‘You know perfectly well how he died. They told us how he died. He had a heart attack. They were having a fancy-dress party or something, it was terribly hot and it all proved too much for him.’

‘I believe there’s more to it. *Much* more.’

‘One good thing about funerals,’ Gerard said, ‘is that they bring people together and rekindle old friendships. It was good to see Nellie, wasn’t it? She’s getting on, but seems completely *compos*. Doesn’t drool or dribble or lurch about. Got rid of Chalfont and bought a house in St John’s Wood. The very best of decisions. That’s what all of us should do.’



'I'd hate living in St John's Wood . . . Nellie's nephew is a detective.'

'Don't think Peverel is a detective.'

'No, not Peverel. Hugh.'

'Hugh Payne? I thought Hugh Payne was in the army.'

'He isn't a real detective, but one of those amateur ones. I've heard some incredible stories. He may be interested in buying the Damascus chest, Nellie says. He's seen it in my catalogue. She is bringing him over to look at it tomorrow.'

'That's splendid, absolutely splendid. I'm afraid I'll be off at some unearthly hour, so I'm bound to miss them. Good lord, it's starting to rain again . . . Rain falling limply in intermittent showers.' He whistled what sounded vaguely like 'The Rain in Spain' between his teeth.

She gazed across at him in an exasperated fashion. 'Aren't you the tiniest bit curious about the sinister secret of La Sorcière, Gerard?'

'I do believe, my dear, that if you ever went to Plato's cave and were asked about a Form or an Ideal, you wouldn't talk about Love or Truth or Beauty, but about the sinister secret of La Sorcière. Why, you make it sound as though they all killed my brother and hushed it up!'

'Perhaps they did. In fact I am sure they did. They looked conspiratorial.'

'Renée Glover seemed as self-possessed as ever. Her manner was perfectly amicable. She said hello and I am so sorry about your brother and she actually smiled at me.'

'It is *me* Glover hates, not you. It was I who dismissed her. Glover adores you. She worships the ground you walk on.' Until a year ago Renée Glover had worked as Felicity's secretary. 'What she did was inexcusable. Outrageous. Poking her nose into my private affairs. Reading my letters.'

'I am sure you were mistaken, my dear.'

'I was *not* mistaken. Oh, I know perfectly well you have a soft spot for her, Gerard. All those cosy little chats in your study. You don't think I am blind, do you?'

'No, not at all, my dear. One couldn't imagine anyone more eagle-eyed than you. Sometimes you even . . .'

'Sometimes I even what, Gerard? See things that are not there? Is that what you were going to say?'

Gerard put on his oblique expression. 'No, no, not at all.' Felicity's getting difficult, he thought, fed up with having to change the topic. 'Such a blessing, never to have been fond of one's brother. Thank God he arrived in a hermetically sealed coffin and now of course he is in an urn. We are terribly lucky, you know. In Greece and countries like that relatives are expected to kiss the loved one's corpse as it lies in the coffin, by way of a final adieu.'

'You should have given that poached egg a wide berth at breakfast,' Felicity said sullenly. 'You're coming out in spots.'

'This is not an allergy. It's a nervous thing.'

She said she didn't believe he had any nerves. 'Did you hear about Stephan? Apparently he's been taken back in.'

'He should never have been allowed out.' Gerard Fenwick stole a glance at his watch and said he needed to go to his study. 'Sorry, my dear, but I am, as they say, being possessed by the Muse, which is also known as the divine *furor*. It would be unwise to ignore the call. The Muse is capricious and wilful and notoriously unpredictable. I may never get another visit.'

'What are you going to do in your study?'

'I am going to write.'

'You are going to *write*?'

'Well, yes. You know perfectly well that's something I do. Do you have to sound so amazed?' He paused with his hand on the door handle. 'I am divided between writing an essay on the subject of funeral cortèges and a bitter-sweet

story of a chap who realizes he is in love with his wife's former secretary.'

'Oh, that's been done *so* many times. I think you should write a murder mystery about a suspicious death that takes place on a tropical island.'

'Murder is something I know nothing about,' he said. He frowned down at his right hand, at the red blotch, which he knew perfectly well was a mosquito bite. 'I suppose I could write a one-act comedy about a distinguished middle-aged couple having a desultory and somewhat pointless kind of conversation. One of those fictions that are rooted in reality. *L'art égale la vie*. It would be fun, I think.'

