

The Murders at Sunset Cañon

I.

In 185- I was practicing law in Mariposa, California, with a friend and partner named Ichabod Thorne. We had a lucrative and free-and-easy time of it among the Mariposians and the wild, rough miners and cattle-raisers of the vicinity. The Vigilance Committee was then a thing of the past; there were rude court-houses, sheriffs, half-civilized policemen, and other formulas, and frequently honest attempts at the administration of justice, to be met with even at the foot of the Sierra Nevada; and consequently my profession found employment as the emergencies of the times arose. True, the Californians were still fond of taking justice in their own hands, and our prim, legal gallows was now and then robbed of its prey by the violence of the mob. But we were accustomed to regard such eccentricities good-naturedly, as arising from the mere force of habit, and were pretty well content so long as we could charge heavy fees, and have them paid in the bright yellow dust which was not only the cause of the presence, in that not very inviting region, of nine-tenths of the inhabitants, but also of nine-tenths of the crimes from which I reaped my own pecuniary harvest.

It was at the close of a pleasant showery Sunday, just at the commencement of the rainy season, which here endures for several months, that I sat in the “office” portion of our rude cabin in Mariposa, awaiting my partner’s return. He had been visiting the Gonzagos, some very dear friends of ours, at Sunset Cañon. This locality was about thirty miles northeast of Mariposa, at the very foot of the towering Sierras, and was aptly and beautifully named, from the loveliness of the spot itself and the general grandeur of the surrounding scenery.

The Cañon was the property of Santiago de Gonzago, who occupied it entirely as a ranche, and who was esteemed one of the best and wealthiest of the native Californians of that vicinity—perhaps of the entire country. He had a large number of peons in his employment, possessed more mules, sheep, and cattle than he could readily count, besides being interested in large quartz-mining claims further south, and the great castle-like building of adobe, where he resided with his wife and his daughter Inez, was quite a primitive place in its way. Gonzago was generally known throughout the country as “the Don.”

Ever since our residence at Mariposa—a period of nearly two years—Thorne and I had been accustomed to spend our Sundays at the Gonzago Ranche, and months before this particular Sunday my handsome young partner had lost his heart, and was generally regarded as the accepted suitor of the fair Inez.

In the evening, late, Thorne came in from the Don’s.

“You found them all well, of course?”

“Yes, and I had a jolly time. But have you heard the news?”

“None at all,” I replied.

“Why that devil La Mort and his rangers are at work again. Only three days ago, in the Long Gully of the second ridge, four miners were murdered in their cabin, and all their ‘loot’ seized. Of course it was the work of that French fiend; for, you know, we heard of him being near Fort Miller only a week ago, and he was then on his way up the valley.”

“Pshaw! it is absurd to ascribe half the murders in California to that poor devil of a Frenchman. He’s bad enough, God knows, but he is not ubiquitous.”

Despite my ridiculing his suspicions I must say I was somewhat alarmed at what I had heard, and was glad enough to be assured by my friend that he had persuaded the Don to use additional precautions in guarding his house. This “La Mort” was a French freebooter and murderer, who had for many months been the terror of San Joaquin valley and the Tulare district. I never heard his real name, nor exactly how he came by the terrible sobriquet by which he was widely known—for there were but few of his countrymen in California, and even the destroying band, of which he was the ostensible head, was mostly composed of Mexicans, with a few desperadoes from the jails and penitentiaries of the Eastern States. As is usually the case with criminals who are seldom seen, and who operate in wild and sparsely populated countries, this villain got credit for more rascalities than it would be possible for him to perform.

Just as we were preparing to turn in there was a knock at the door, and I admitted a stranger. The still falling rain, and consequent muddy ground, had hindered my hearing the approach of his horse, which I now perceived standing in front of the house. The stranger was a medium-sized, wiry-looking fellow, with short sandy whiskers, rather sinister green eyes, thoroughly dressed to meet the emergency of the weather, and with a certain official brusqueness in his manner and address. The moment I saw him I thought him to be a sheriff or sheriff’s deputy from some neighboring county; and so, according to his own statement, he proved to be.

“Is this Mr. U—?” he said, gruffly, but with a sort of politeness in his tone, which also appeared to contain a slightly foreign accent.

I bowed assent, and he continued:

“Farceur is my name. I am the chief of the San Francisco detective force. You have doubtless heard of me before?”

Therewith surrendered my veracity to my desire to be polite by signifying that fame of Mr. Farceur, the famous San Francisco Detective, had penetrated far deeper into the interior than Mariposa.

“I am in the special employment at present,” continued Mr. Farceur, “of a wealthy firm—Messrs. B—& Co.—of San Francisco, for the capture of a notorious thief and scoundrel, through whom they have lost heavily. I was directed to call upon you and your partner by Mr. Stanwix, their attorney at law. Here is my badge.”

Detective Farceur hereupon threw open his heavy riding-cloak and displayed an elaborately-mounted German-silver badge, or shield; but it scarcely needed this display, I thought, to

determine the office of the wearer. In my professional capacity I had had to deal with numerous specimens of these gentry, and my present visitor's entire bearing was that of the Detective *par excellence*. Every word he uttered was given with that premeditated terseness which he would have displayed in the witness-box, while confronting the criminal whom he had hunted down to justice; he accompanied himself with explanatory gestures, and that keen, restless, half-evil green eye of his would dance about in his head from one object to another as he spoke till you thought that it could have no interest in the owner's words, while at the same time it appeared wonderfully wide awake. As I received and made a mental note of these impressions almost immediately, and as I was well acquainted with Mr. Stanwix, the gentleman mentioned, and knew him to be in the employment of the San Francisco firm alluded to by my visitor, I shook the latter by the hand and asked him to take a seat before the fire. On second thoughts I invited him to partake of the evening meal, the remnants of which still covered the little table in the middle of the room. He accepted my hospitality without any profusion of thanks, and ate like a very hungry man; while Thorne, weary after his long ride, threw himself upon the bed in another corner of the room without undressing, and was soon sound asleep.

Detective Farceur signified that he intended to remain all night, if I had no objection, and, as I made none, all night he accordingly staid—only leaving the room long enough to stable and feed his horse in the rough shed which answered for that purpose immediately back of the house.

Farceur appeared to be very fond of talking, and he talked well. According to his own account his exploits in his peculiar branch of adventure were of a most marvelous character. He appeared to have spent his life in chasing thieves and forgers and murderers all over the inhabitable globe. I made a wide margin for everything he said. Indeed, one or two of his yarns were, to my own knowledge, entirely without foundation; but then he was very entertaining, and, in fact, quite witty at times, so that I threw no cold water on his garrulity by letting him see that I knew him to be a liar. His powers of mimicry were also quite marvelous. By a sudden twist of his short, stumpy nose he would make himself appear nigh a century old, or another skillful arrangement of his features would give him the fresh, blooming appearance of a country clown; while his flexibility of voice accompanied his assumed characters to perfection.

It was some time before it occurred to me to ask him the object of his presence in Mariposa. Imagine my surprise when he coolly informed me that he was in search of the famous La Mort.

“La Mort!” I exclaimed. “Is it possible that that villain can be captured?”

“There is one man in California who can and will capture him,” said Farceur.

“And who may that be?”

“Modesty forbids me mentioning names,” was the complacent reply.

“Oh! Ah!”

Then this intensely modest man proceeded to give me recitals of numerous desperate hand-to-hand encounters which he had had with the redoubtable freebooter, all of which bore marks, both

chronologically and otherwise, of being strictly untrue. He heard my recital of Thorne's intelligence of the murder at Long Gully with an impassive countenance, and then said, knowingly tapping his nose with his forefinger, that he had known all about it hours before, and more too—a glaring falsehood, if his introductory assertion, that he had just come from San Francisco, were true.

Among other accomplishments of Detective Farceur his facility as a “pump” was something worthy of admiration. I had always flattered myself that I was peculiarly non-committal, even for a member of my profession, but before our conversation was concluded, I was mortified to find that my guest had actually pumped me dry. He knew all about my business, knew of my intimacy with the inhabitants of Sunset Cañon, knew of Thorne's visit there and recent return thence, and pretty much every thing else that could be of any interest. I was so chagrined at this that I was not displeased when he signified a desire to retire. Showing him to our “spare bed” in the back room of our shanty, I threw myself beside my partner, and was soon in a strange, grotesque dream, in which law offices, robbers, murderers, and San Francisco detectives were senselessly jumbled up together; but not before several sonorous and healthy snores from the next room apprised me that Mr. Farceur was fast forgetting the fatigues of his long ride in the arms of nature's sweet restorer.

II.

We were all awakened rather early in the morning—that is, at about 9 o'clock, for we were not early risers—by a messenger from Gonzago's Rancho, who thundered at the door with noise enough to awaken the dead. I threw up the window hastily, and recognized the man below to be one of the Don's peons. He was standing at the door, with his face perfectly livid with apprehension and emotion, and the mule from which he had just dismounted was covered with foam and breathing hard.

“What is the matter, Antonio?” I exclaimed, dismayed at the man's horrified appearance; and at this moment Thorne also came to the casement, while I could hear my guest of the night before bustling about in the room behind me.

But the man was too breathless and terrified to speak. Thorne opened the door, and we soon had him inside, when he sank exhausted in a chair. A pull at my flask of whisky revived him, and he gasped faintly, “La Mort!”

“What's up, my man, what's up? Out with it!” said the bluff detective.

The man spoke English very imperfectly, and we had some difficulty in comprehending him.

“They're—they're murdered!” at last we made out.

“Murdered! who?”

“The Señor, Don de Gonzago!”

“Impossible!”

“Si, Señor, and both the others!”

“What!” almost shrieked Thorne; “not Inez? surely not Senora Inez?”

“Si, Señor! Oh, oh, oh!” and the poor man began to rock himself to and fro, and to groan and whine, old woman like, in the extremity of his terror.

Thorne’s grief and rage at this horrible news was indescribable, and it scarcely exceeded my own. While this was being extracted, word by word, from the messenger, Mr. Farceur had said very little. He had sat in the midst of us, with a note book in his hand, busily making memoranda, and watching everything keenly with those little green eyes of his, but without displaying the least emotion. In spite of my grief and horror I could not withhold a sort of admiration for the utter impassibility of the detective under these trying circumstances. If he was a gasconade, he unquestionably at the same time possessed the best qualities of a good officer.

The intelligence spread through the town like wild-fire, and in a short time our little office was besieged by the curious and horror-loving of all sexes and ages, both American and Mexican. Detective Farceur took command of everything with the ease of a man who understands a position, and knows how to take advantage of it. The people soon became aware of the nature of his office and the object of his visit to their town. They therefore looked upon him as their natural leader in this emergency, and I was glad enough to relinquish any responsibility which I might otherwise have been compelled to assume. In a short time upward of a dozen stalwart and eager men were mounted in front of my office, waiting for us to accompany them on the pursuit of La Mort and his gang; for at first no one doubted that this redoubtable wretch was the author of all the mischief. The influence of Gonzago, his wealth, and the general esteem in which he was held, served to render this tragedy doubly important, and everyone appeared to be anxious to do something toward achieving the ends of justice.

When we were about to start Detective Farceur, in his most consequential manner, called together a sort of council-of-war in the office. He was hardly the same man, in appearance, of the night before. A hideous black patch concealed one of his twinkling green eyes, and he wore a black wig of vast and voluminous proportions. This, he explained, with a knowing wink from his remaining green eye, was for the purpose of deceiving La Mort and his comrades, to many of whom he professed to be personally known.

“Gentlemen”—said the wiry detective, with another knowing wink, and with the air of a Major-General addressing the members of his staff on the eve of an offensive movement requiring peculiar strategy—“Gentlemen, you have all got but vague notions of the interior workings of this great crime; while I, from my professional habits of quick, comprehensive, and lynx-eyed observation, have already grasped all the circumstances of the case, and now know all about it. This murder has been the work of no marauding band—no violent operation, you see; but it is the perpetration of one individual—two at the utmost. Is La Mort the chief actor? Perhaps he is; and, again, perhaps he isn’t. Do not let us be blindly governed by our unruly prejudices. Let us first look among ourselves, and see if there is no one at whom the long, marble, unerring finger

of suspicion may point. Will any of you gentlemen oblige me with the loan of a pair of wristbands—you understand, hand-cuffs, of course?”

As Detective Farceur approached the conclusion of this rather egotistical speech his single restless green eye rested steadfastly upon my friend and partner, Ichabod Thorne. The hand-cuffs were speedily forthcoming, and the detective examined them with a critical eye, lightly jingling the two bracelets against each other. Apparently satisfied of their soundness he approached Thorne with a sinister smile and said, delicately, “Allow me, Sir?”

I could not forbear smiling at what appeared to be the humor of the detective. Thorne, however, still laboring under the terrible stroke which had visited him, was in no humor for jest or play, and roughly put out both hands to repulse the detective. But, to our amazement, there were just two little clicks, and Thorne found himself securely hand-cuffed.

“Take them off, you cursed fool!” he growled, with an oath. “This is no time for fooling!”

“I agree with you perfectly,” said Mr. Detective Farceur, of San Francisco, “and that is just the reason why I am not fooling. I never fool during business hours.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Thorne, his face now fairly white with anger.

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Detective Farceur, very coolly disregarding the question, and turning to the rest of us; “gentlemen, excuse my abruptness, but business is business. Mind what I say; I do not accuse this gentleman of having murdered three innocent, helpless human beings. All I mean to say is, that a reasonable amount of suspicion rests upon his head; and experience has taught me that when suspicion rests upon a man, guilty or not guilty, grab him; for you may need him in the future.”

Thorne here quietly suppressed his rage and put on the air of a man who is compelled, for a certain length of time, to be bored by a buffoon.

“Come, come,” said I, getting angry also; “let us have done with this farce, and be off!” And at the same time a number of others, likewise regarding the matter in the light of an unseasonable joke, began to show signs of impatience.

“Farce!” exclaimed the detective with some dignity; “gentlemen, this is no farce. This gentleman” (indicating Thorne by a motion of his head) “visited the scene of the murder yesterday and returned here last night at half past ten o’clock. Is *that* no ground of suspicion?”

“No, certainly not!” said half a dozen voices in concert.

“Very good, gentlemen,” resumed the detective, cool as before; “but do you see those two little specks of blood on the shirt-sleeve of the prisoner; and that one big spot of the same sanguineous, red current of life on his buckskin boots? Are those, gentlemen, no grounds of suspicion?”

We all looked curiously at the portion of Thorne's dress indicated (and none more curiously than the prisoner himself), and we made no answer, for there, sure enough, were the red, dark stains which blood alone can leave. Thorne saw them also, and was considerably confused.

"Gentlemen, do you see this?" continued the detective; "is this no ground of suspicion?" and with these words, with a quick, dextrous movement, he put his hand in my partner's bosom and drew forth a long dagger, the bright blade of which was slightly dimmed with dry blood. "Perhaps," continued Farceur, "some of you gentlemen may have seen this little sticker before. At any rate the jewels in the hilt are alone worth a small fortune; and what is this engraved upon the blade?" He looked at it attentively, and read in slow, distinct tones, "Santiago de Gonzago, from his friend Pedro de Carlema, 1834."

Thorne looked absolutely stunned with surprise and alarm. We had all seen the dagger before, and there was a general shrinking from my partner's side. I alone remained near, perfectly confident of his being the victim of some villainous trick. A further search of the prisoner, who submitted quietly, produced the following memorandum, hastily scrawled in lead-pencil on the fly leaf of his notebook:

"Ten steps northward from the great pine tree; then twelve steps eastward into the chaparral; stop and dig."

"Do any of you gentlemen happen to know of a particular pine tree at or near the place of the murder?"

Yes, we knew of an enormous pine just outside of Gonzago's residence, for it had long ago been considered as a kind of landmark for travelers from the West to the quartz mines of the Sierras.

"Then, gentlemen," resumed the detective, "we may at once proceed to Sunset Cañon. If I am not much mistaken we shall find some treasure in close proximity to that big pine tree."

"Wait," said I. "Let me see that paper." I took it and examined it closely. It was written in a hasty, trembling hand, but I had no hesitation in declaring that it was not in my friend's handwriting.

"I hope that is so, Sir," said Farceur, with a shake of his head, as much as to say that he did not believe what I asserted. "I hope that is so, Sir; but then, you know, when a man is excited, and in a hurry, and perhaps in the dark, he isn't always particular how he writes, you know."

If an angel had leaned from the sky and proclaimed my friend's guilt in trumpet tones I would have disbelieved it. Thorne himself was now perfectly self-possessed, and seemed resolved to take every thing easily. The only explanation he deigned to offer was, that he was the victim of a malicious trick, which would soon be exposed, and its perpetrator properly punished. But it was not without great alarm that I noticed the impression which the detective's words had made upon the wild, rough characters who thronged my office. They did not know Thorne so well as they did me, and now they eyed him with scowls of suspicion and positive hatred; while Dan Mifflin, a gigantic miner, who was the bully and most disreputable character of the community, placed

one hand upon his revolver, and with the other made a rapid and ominous motion under his chin, accompanied by a strange sound in his throat, indicative of the operation of a hempen cravat.

Nevertheless, no violence was offered, and in a few minutes we all started for the Cañon; I riding by my friend to assist him in managing his horse, as he had but little use of his hands on account of the handcuffs.

We reached the Cañon fully three hours before sunset, and found the rather numerous population of the ranche in a state of great excitement, the women and children standing about in the sun in whispering groups. Of course our arrival, when the object of our visit was made known, was a subject of much interest. We entered the kind of rude court-yard of the ranche, and soon commenced our inspection. The principal building, in which the murdered Don and his family had resided, was a large one-storied affair, with plain, rough walls of adobe, and comprising some five or six apartments. The superstitious peons had made no attempt to remove the dead bodies, which were lying just where they had been found in the morning. I was even more alarmed when I saw the expressions of distrust and hatred with which they eyed my shackled friend when they learned from some of our party the nature of the improvised examination which had resulted in his being ironed by Farceur. As we entered the house of death, with the detective at our head, we were followed by numbers of peons, who, with other ignorant classes, still adhere to the superstition that if a murderer touch the corpse of his victim his guilt will be inevitably proven by a sudden gush of blood from the wounds he has inflicted. Thorne bore himself even better than I had expected; for I feared that he would be completely overcome by the sight of his murdered friends, and that his emotion would augment the disfavor in which he was already viewed.

I will not dwell upon the sickening details of this ghastly spectacle. The first bedchamber we entered contained the dead bodies of Gonzago and his wife. The former had probably been slain in his sleep, and had barely stirred after receiving the deep stab which had penetrated his heart. The wife had probably been awakened in time to grapple once or twice ineffectually with the murderer, as the body bore a number of wounds, and its strained, unnatural position on the floor indicated that its owner had sprang or been dragged from the couch. In order to satisfy the Mexicans and one or two of our own party, Thorne took each of the dead bodies by the hand and gazed long and earnestly in their ghastly faces; this action, of course, being followed by none of the anticipated gush of blood from the now cold wounds.

I pitied him sincerely at the conclusion of this trying ordeal—that is, in that portion of it where we visited the chamber of the murdered Inez, whom he had loved with all the affection of a strong and earnest disposition. The poor girl had also, probably, never awakened to the cruel blow which had deprived her of life. She had received two stabs, both in the breast, and either one of them sufficient to have effected immediate death; and the body was now lying in an easy posture on the couch, with a pleasant, natural expression on the pale, beautiful, upturned countenance, whose loveliness, after the eyes had been closed, was not in the least distorted by the violence of the agent that destroyed her. Almost everyone knew of Thorne's former intimacy, and he was narrowly watched as he approached the bed. His grief was simple and noble. He knelt down, and silently wept upon the cold, dead hand, while one or two of those strong, terrible sobs, which can only be wrung from a brave, manly heart, escaped him; a moment more and he

was himself again, and upon his feet. His action here would have created a favorable impression in sticks and stones; but Mexican peasantry are duller than sticks, and the prejudices of wild, rough miners, ever searching morbidly for “examples” to terrify criminals, are much more insensate than the hardest granite; so my friend was looked upon with increased dislike and suspicion.

It is hardly necessary to enlarge upon the numerous unnecessary and even ridiculous examinations carried on by Mr. Detective Farceur during that afternoon and evening; but they all went to prove to everyone but myself that La Mort was a myth, and that Thorne was the guilty man. I confess that my faith in his innocence was for a moment staggered when, upon following the written instructions which had been found in his vest pocket, we dug for the treasure in the chaparral, and disclosed a casket, known to be the Don’s property, containing several thousand dollars in gold checks and coin, together with some papers which, however, could be of no value to anyone but Gonzago himself. My confidence in my friend’s innocence immediately returned upon serious reflection; for the house had been robbed of valuables to ten times the amount discovered in the casket; and it was extremely improbable that the robber would keep a memorandum of only the most insignificant portion of the plunder. But this argument met with no favor with Detective Farceur and the rest.

“You see, there may have been other memoranda that we missed,” said the detective, cocking that little green eye of his. “Certainly there is one thing to be done, and one only. Your *friend* [emphasizing the word *friend*] must be consigned to the jail at Mariposa—that is, if we *get* him there.”

There was something ominous in the tone in which the latter portion of this sentence (“if we *get* him there”) was spoken, and did not by any means serve to diminish my anxiety. The next morning—we passed the night at the ranche, with Thorne under a strong guard—the building in which we were quartered was beset by a mob of nearly two hundred Mexicans—peons of the murdered man, and others, who had gathered from far and near—led by two or three “white men,” prominent among whom was the Dan Mifflin before referred to. They were greatly infuriated, and demanded the instant surrender of the prisoner to their vengeance. To my very great surprise Detective Farceur was rather lukewarm in his resistance of the mob. He talked a great deal about summary justice, sniffled about the law being exceedingly lax, and looked with servile obsequiousness upon the ignorant ruffians who were most conspicuous and clamorous. Luckily there were six of our party upon whom I could depend. They were stout, hardy, honest fellows, rude miners from the mountains, some of whom were under personal obligations to me, and I placed myself at their head with confidence.

The door was securely barred in a few seconds, and the first blow against it was struck by the ruffian Mifflin, armed with an axe. I appeared at the casement, revolver in hand, and resolved to act promptly.

“If you strike that door once more,” said I, addressing Mifflin, “I will put a bullet through your heart!”

“Two can play at that game!” exclaimed the villain, and, swerving back, he dropped his axe and

clutched a revolver.

I instantly discharged my pistol, and, with an oath and a cry of pain, his right arm dropped nerveless at his side, broken and splintered at the elbow. The crowd at his back commenced to advance with waving knives and pistols, and I saw that no time was to be lost. Calling upon my six men to prepare for fight, I unbarred the door, swung it open, and went out, still retaining my pistol in my hand, ready for further use.

“What do you want?” I asked, and they knew by my tone of voice that I was not to be trifled with.

“We want to hang that bloody-minded *friend* of yours!” cried Phil Massey, another desperado from the coast. His reply was hailed with fierce shouts and yells from the motley crew around him.

“You must prove him guilty before you hang him,” I said, coolly. “He will be imprisoned and regularly tried at Mariposa, and, if found guilty, he will be hung—not before. *You* hang him, you dirty, contemptible cut-throats. Would you hang him the way you strung up poor Rollin, for the murder he never committed, last spring? Would you hang him as you did that wretched Jew peddler, only a month ago, when his innocence was proved, and the real criminal arrested, before his body was cold? Look at your leaders now, you infernal fools! Dan Mifflin there owes his neck to the noose for the murder of two Indians on the Kern River, less than a year ago; Phil Massey there, beat a Mexican woman to death at the Los Angeles fandangoes; and the dirty thief next to him has twice escaped the penalty for horse-stealing! *You* hang him! There are six true men behind me, armed to the teeth; and for my character, you know it well enough. The first man who advances a step for the purpose of violence is a dead man! Come on, if you want fight!”

This address had even a better effect than I had anticipated. My whole party filed out of the building, with revolvers cocked and ready for use, and the demonstration of the mob ceased almost on the instant, the Mexicans composing it sheathing their weapons, and slinking away to their huts, and all the Americans, except the three especially complimented in my little speech, coming toward us, and looking considerably ashamed of themselves. I cared nothing for the defection of Mifflin and his brother ruffians; and, after giving Mr. Detective Farceur a brief lecture, which probably did not materially increase his self-esteem, the whole party were soon mounted, and riding homeward, with the prisoner in our midst. In about three hours and a half he was safely lodged, under strong guard, in the old stone-building which answered for the Mariposa jail.

III.

There was not much “red tape” in the process of a California criminal trial in those days. The judge was on hand early, the prosecuting attorney “rushed” his case with careless rapidity, and witnesses for either side were rattled off without an excess of circumlocution. Through my influence, which was considerable, the trial of Thorne lasted more than one day—an unusual thing at that time.

I confess that I was downhearted at the conclusion of the first day. Detective Farceur was the principal witness, and he talked to the jury for about three hours on the stretch. Everything looked black for my friend, in whose innocence I never ceased to firmly believe. The Judge, Mr. Y—, who was very friendly to us both, also confessed that there was little hope. The first day had been entirely occupied with the prosecution, and the night found me racking my brains in order to contrive some kind of substantial defense to be forthcoming on the morrow, when a strange chance threw the means of completely vindicating my friend's honor directly across my path.

It had rained during the day, but the night was calm and lovely, with a wealth of moonlight, when I walked restlessly toward the banks of the little river, in a vain endeavor to obtain some mental repose. As I drew near the scrub-oaks which grew thickly on the margin of the stream I caught the sound of voices engaged in low but angry altercation. A strange feeling, which I had never experienced before, impelled me to approach and listen. Using great care, I got very near to the speakers without being discovered, and there listened to a conversation carried on in French which riveted me to the spot with mingled emotions of amazement and delight. Two horrible criminals were discussing villainies of the past and planning new ones for the future; and the voice of one of them was clearly recognizable. I only listened for a very few minutes, and then returned swiftly and silently to my office, with a mountain of anxiety removed from my breast.

On the following morning the rude courtroom was even more densely thronged than on the preceding day. The Judge was on the bench, the jury in their places, and every thing ready for work when I entered the room. Thorne, who had been considerably depressed on the preceding day, quickly caught the reflex of my beaming countenance and brightened up amazingly; while the jurymen yawned, as though they would have gladly pronounced a verdict of "guilty" at once, without waiting for a long-winded argument from me.

"Are you ready with your defense, Mr. Y—?" inquired the Judge.

"I will be in a moment, Sir, as soon as some friends of mine arrive," I replied. "And here they are."

At that moment the room was invaded by twelve men, armed to the teeth, who, as previously arranged, posted themselves in different portions of the room so as to effectually guard all modes of exit. Even the two windows, though placed high above the floor, were not neglected. The prosecuting attorney made a great splutter about this "high-handed proceeding," as he was pleased to denominate it, and even the Judge requested an explanation in a rather abrupt manner. But I assured his Honor, and everyone present, that, before I finished my defense, the wisdom of the "high-handed proceeding" would be made manifest to all.

I then took up the case and gave the learned Judge the benefit of a harangue, which I purposely spun out to ridiculous length, and in which I viewed all of the phases of the evidence for the prosecution in a hundred lights, and weighed them with the finesse of a miser counting his hoard. The prosecuting attorney at first gaped, then yawned, and then fretted and fumed; and, at last,

even the Judge lost patience and said, rather pettishly: "This is entirely unnecessary, Mr. U—; your remarks produce no effect upon the jury. If you have any witnesses produce them."

"I have but one, your Honor."

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Detective Farceur, of San Francisco."

Everyone appeared to be considerably astonished at this, but none more so than the detective himself. He was still disguised by the hideous black patch, but his one sharp, little green eye twinkled nervously as he once more mounted the witness stand, which was only an arm's-length from my own position. The reader must remember that the scene and conversation which I am about to describe occurred in California in the year 185-, and not in a very formal court of justice.

Q. "Mr. Farceur, how long have you been a detective policeman?"

A. "About twenty years, off and on."

Q. "Where were you on the night of the murder which Mr. Thorne is accused of having committed?"

A. "On my way to this place from the West. I arrived at your office on that night."

Q. "Are you sure you did not come from the northeast instead of the west?"

A. "Very sure I did not."

Q. "Mr. Farceur, do you speak French?"

A. "Imperfectly."

Q. "You spoke it very fluently in your conversation with a fellow-villain among the scrub-oaks on the river bank last night."

The detective started as if he had received a load of buck-shot. His little green eye shrank so far back in his head that it looked like a shining glass-bead, and he gave other indications of being decidedly ill at ease. My remaining queries were short and sweet.

Q. "Mr. Detective, did you never go by any other name than 'Farceur?' "

A. "No, Sir."

Q. "I think you have. Suppose you let the Judge and jury see your face. I will assist you."

With that I reached my hand out very quickly, and with two motions deprived the witness of his eye-patch, of his false whiskers, and of two cunning wigs, which made a great alteration in his personal appearance. He now stood forth a clean-shaven, black-haired villain, with crime stamped legibly upon every lineament.

“Now, Mr. Detective Farceur,” I resumed, “are you sure there is not another name by which you are best known, and to which you are accustomed to answer?”

“No,” he replied doggedly, “I know of none.”

“But I know your name perfectly,” I persisted, “and I want these people to know it. It is La Mort!”

The effect of these words, spoken in a loud voice, was magical. As one man every person in the courtroom sprang to his feet. The counterfeit detective looked about wildly, and then, drawing a knife from his bosom, cleared the inclosure at a bound, and rushed to the door. But in an instant he was knocked down and dragged back to the stand.

It is scarcely worthwhile for me to dwell upon the summary manner in which I proved him, out of his own mouth, to be the murderer of the Gonzago family, and to be none other than the dreaded La Mort. He was hung the next morning in the open plaza, in the presence of several thousand people. I never could exactly fathom his motives for the plot by which he so nearly succeeded in procuring the execution of an innocent man; but, of course, the golden god must have had something to do with it. Lynch law was not so popular in Mariposa county for a number of years thereafter.

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