

Hung By Three Hairs

On a wild, tempestuous night in the month of November, 1881, a brutal murder was committed in the village of Las Bosques, Mexico, the victim an aged banker, named Juan Castillo. He was wealthy, and being of a charitable disposition, made many bequests to the poor in the locality. The announcement of his murder created the wildest excitement in the community, and as circumstance seemed to point to his son as the guilty party, numerous threats were made to lynch the young man.

Shortly after the discovery of the crime, the chief of police, accompanied by a rising young detective, arrived on the spot. The news had spread like wildfire, and the crowd in front of the murdered man's house was dense and excited. When the officers entered the room the dead man lay upon the floor in the same condition as he had been found by his son.

Upon investigation it was learned that Signor Castillo, contrary to his usual custom, had retired early on the night of the murder. Early in the morning, Pedrillo, his son, entered his father's room and found him a corpse on the floor. There was abundant evidence of a severe struggle having taken place, but no definite clue had as yet been obtained of the murderer. Pedrillo was strongly suspected of having caused the death of his father; but the detective listened to his statement of the facts and was satisfied that the young man was entirely innocent of the charge.

Left alone, with the murdered man, the detective leaned over the corpse and found that the man's face had been beaten out of shape by some kind of iron instrument, which had also aided the murderer in opening his victim's safe. Blood was everywhere— on the doors, windows, walls, bedstead; nothing, save one thing, escaped the crimson mark.

The murderer had entered by a window, and aroused the banker, whom, to escape recognition, he murdered. One of the dead man's hands was open, while the other was closed. The tiniest of something glistened in the clenched hand as the light fell on it.

With difficulty the detective opened the nerveless fingers, and found sticking to them three white hairs.

This closed the investigation, and with no other clue to work on save the three white hairs, the detective decided to bring someone to the gallows.

The murder became a nine days' wonder. Various theories were advanced regarding it, and it was generally believed that the dark mystery would never be solved. Pedrillo came forward and proved himself beyond the peradventure of a doubt, innocent of the crime of parricide.

The detective, with the three white hairs, set to work to unravel the intricate mystery. He immediately came to the conclusion that a man of the age which these hairs indicated, could not have overcome Signor Castillo, who possessed great strength for his years.

Upon submitting them to a microscope he discovered that they were dead—that they had been pulled from a wig. The murderer, then, had concealed his natural hair beneath a wig.

On the following day the detective entered a large hair emporium and asked to be shown white wigs. The salesman looked significantly at the detective's hair, which was raven black.

“You need not look at me,” said the detective, “the wig is for my father.”

“That's just what another gentleman said last week,” said the clerk, as he handed down a box from a shelf.

Quietly plucking a couple of hairs from the uppermost wig, the detective placed them in his pocketbook.

“My father's nephew,” said the detective, “is looking for a suitable wig for his uncle, and probably he is the party you refer to. Would you please describe him?”

“He was about thirty years of age, dark complexion, small black eyes, and wore a heavy black mustache.”

The detective left the store.

Elated with his morning's success, he in a short time found himself in the banking house of the murdered Signor Castillo. Approaching the cashier, Signor Alvarez, he asked that gentleman some questions. While answering them the latter became satisfied that the man referred to by the clerk in the hair emporium and Alvarez were one and the same, dark complexion, small black eyes, and wore a heavy black moustache.

That night the detective followed Alvarez to one of the most noted gambling dens of the city. Within an hour he lost over five thousand dollars. For two weeks the officer dogged the man's footsteps. At length it was decided by the detective to bring his espionage to a close. He had carelessly mentioned, one night in his presence, the mystery which seemed to envelope the murder of Signor Castillo, and a pallor swept across the face of Alvarez.

He was seated in the parlor of a courtesan of the city, and his reputed mistress, when one night the detective rang the house bell. Upon being ushered into the cashier's presence, the officer quietly but firmly informed Alvarez that he was under arrest on charge of murdering Signor Castillo. The woman on this announcement flew at the detective like an infuriated tigress, and seizing him by the throat attempted to draw a revolver from her bosom. In doing so the weapon became entangled in her dress, and was unintentionally discharged, the ball entering her right lung and producing a hemorrhage from the effects of which she died before medical assistance could be procured.

Alvarez attempted to escape in the confusion, but seeing the pistol of the detective pointed at him he quietly surrendered. While the handcuffs were being placed about his wrists he sank upon the floor and clasped the officer's knees imploringly.

"Oh! Do not take me before the law," cried the wretched man. "I did kill Castillo. I wanted money to keep my mistress, and I took it, and—his life. Though she urged me to the crime, I hold myself wholly to blame. For God's sake loan me your pistol, and let me end the most wretched life in existence."

When being carried to the scaffold to expiate his crime, he was heard to cry in tones of despair:

"Those hairs—these accursed hairs! And must I be hanged by three hairs?"

Lewis County Democrat [NY], April 14, 1883