

Murdered Himself

About half a mile from the village of Oposura, Mexico, facing the high road, and separated from the river Yagua by a belt of trees, there stood some years ago a long, low cottage known as La Bolsa. Senor Rodriguez, who was a squarely-built, clean-shaven man of about 40, with gray hair, moustache and goatee, and with nothing remarkable about him except a deep cut over his right eyebrow, had now been occupying the cottage for a little over a year. Considerable speculation was indulged in as to whom Rodriguez was and what he did for a living. He never volunteered any information on the score, but on one occasion he was heard to say something which led to the inference that he had been a sea captain, and on the strength of it the residents of the village called him the captain.

About this time the captain had got into trouble. He owed his landlord and the village tradesmen in the neighborhood of \$500, and the patience of his creditors was nearly exhausted, when one day they received a letter from the captain in which he wrote that he would satisfy their claims on the following Monday, as a legacy left by a distant relative had been paid into his account at the village bank.

On Saturday the captain came into town, met his landlord's son, chatted pleasantly with the young man and invited him to accompany him to the bank. He remained at the bank about ten minutes, and came out at the end of that time, buttoning into the breast pocket of his coat a fat-looking pocket-book. He then went straight home, after making a few purchases and bidding the young man good-day.

On Sunday morning the villagers were startled by the announcement made by the captain's servant at the police station that her master had been murdered the night before and robbed. The inspector and the whole available police force of the village, consisting of two policemen, set off for La Bolsa to unearth the mystery.

On reaching the building the windows and doors in front were closed and locked. On going round to the back the door leading from the sitting-room to the garden, which sloped down to the river, was found to be open, and on entering the sitting-room drops of blood were seen along the carpet between the staircase and the garden door. On the staircase itself the drops of blood were more frequent. The bedroom, however, was clearly the place where the murder had been committed. The table by the window had been pushed out of its place; the only two chairs in the room were lying on the floor. The bed, which had not been slept in, was deluged with blood, and in the middle of it was a deep indentation, as if a heavy body had been pressed down upon it. A large clasp-knife, stained with blood, was lying on the pillow, and by the door on the floor was an open pocket-book. So much the Inspector saw at a glance as he entered. He took the pocket-book and looked carefully through it: it was empty, but lying near it, and behind the door, was a piece of neatly-folded paper. It had evidently fallen from the pocket-book while the murderer was emptying the contents. It was a half-sheet of note paper folded in three, and written on it were the numbers and value of forty-two bank notes, the total of which amounted to \$3,750. Here was a clue at once. An officer was immediately dispatched to the village with the paper to inquire of the bank authorities whether these were the numbers of the notes which had been paid to the captain the day before. He also received orders to await the arrival of Capt. Salegria, a well-

known and daring Mexican detective, who was to arrive in the village at noon that day to visit an old friend. The bank identified the numbers on the paper as those of the bank notes paid the day before to the captain. The money had been paid him by the bank in pursuance of an order contained in a letter on Saturday morning from one of its correspondents, Colez, Garcia & Co., a large firm doing an immense business with the United States. Further inquiries being made by the officer, it was ascertained that a man, who seemed to avoid observation, was seen driving along the rural road early on the morning of the murder in a vehicle very much of the style used in the country. The man who drove the mysterious man to where he could obtain a stage which ran on the old Oposura road, showed the bank bill which the stranger had given him to change, and it was found to be one of those stolen from the captain.

From the indications outside, there was no doubt that the murderer had gone out of the sitting-room backward, dragging the body of his victim after him. Across the small grass plot, and half way through the belt of trees, the footsteps continued; there they ceased. On the soft mud and leaves were an impression as if a long, heavy body had been laid there; near this impression, lying on the ground, was a spade, and at the distance of a few feet the ground had been dug up as if it had been intended to bury the body there. The project, however, had been given up, as the murderer had thought of a better plan for disposing of the body. But where? In the river, of course! Sure enough, in the river bank the footprints were again found. The river had been dragged up and down and sideways and across, and at every conceivable angle, but no body had been found. The inspector was getting impatient when a road wagon drove up and a dapper little man, with a swarthy complexion and a heavy black moustache, jumped out. The stranger was none other than Capt. Salegria, the famous detective. In a few minutes the detective had heard all that the inspector had to tell.

“Let me see,” said the detective. “All the village, you say, knew the captain would have money to pay his debts?”

The inspector nodded.

“Which amounted to about \$500, more or less?”

The inspector nodded again.

“And he drew out of the bank \$3,750 to pay \$500, did he?”

This was a new light to the inspector, who shook his head cautiously.

“From whom did the order to pay the money come?”

“Colez, Garcia & Co.”

“Colez, Garcia & Co.,” repeated Salegria, referring to his note book; “the great American traders.”

“And you suspect no one?”

“No one except the man who passed the note.”

The detective and the inspector entered the house. After looking over the kitchen and buxom widow’s bedroom without making any discovery, the two went to the captain’s bedroom. Everything of moment was carefully examined.

A pair of boots lying in the corner of the room finally attracted the detective’s attention. Something in the lining of one of them seemed to interest him, for he again referred to his pocket-book. Having finished his examination of the bedroom the detective went down-stairs, taking one of the boots with him and inspecting each stair as he descended. These were apparently more satisfactory, for his smile brightened considerably, and after he had been shown the traces of blood along the floor of the sitting-room it had expanded into a broad grin.

He walked to the table, and turned over the books and papers till he found some sheets of blotting paper. These he examined attentively, holding them up to the light and turning them in every possible direction. The result seemed satisfactory, for he pocketed them.

“And now about the captain,” said the detective, closing the cleanest footprint he could find in the soft mud and pulling the boot out of his pocket. “His name is Rodriguez, you say. What is he captain of?”

“Nothing that I know of, but they do say that he has been a captain in the China trade.”

“What sort of a man is he?”

“Tall, spare-built, about 40, gray hair, and no whiskers.”

“Deep cut over his right eyebrow,” added the detective quietly, as he stooped and fitted the boot which he had taken from the captain’s room into the impression in the mud.

“Yes,” said the inspector, puzzled at the detective’s knowledge.

“He never went by that name here, did he?” asked the detective, handing the boot to the inspector, on the lining of which was written “A. Perez.”

“Never.”

He was getting more and more puzzled.

“Perez, alias Cova, alias Delgado, and now alias Rodriguez; I’ve wanted him these three years,” said the detective, cheerfully. “I’ve got him now.”

“Yes,” said the inspector, grimly, “he’s safe enough over there.”

And he jerked his thumb toward the river.

“Bless you,” said the detective, “he’s nearer America by this time. He’ll die in his boots or with the rope around his neck yet. Don’t you see the fellow has murdered himself and bolted with the swag? When I found that boot I thought how it was, and this settled it,” said the detective, pulling the sheets of blotting paper out of his pocket and holding them to the inspector. There, all over them, were the words Colez, Garcia & Co., in a neat, clerk-like hand, with that peculiar flourish at the end which those who had dealings with that eminent house knew so well. “That letter to the village bank is a forgery; it’s not the first time he has served Colez, Garcia & Co. this trick. He was in their American house five years; came to them with a forged character, robbed them to the tune of \$22,000 and bolted. He’s been smuggling and thieving all over the world since then. But I must be off. I wouldn’t miss him for anything.”

The detective was right. The village bank found, to its astonishment, that Colez, Garcia & Co. repudiated the letter which purported to bear their signature. It was a forgery. Some days later the captain was arrested, just as he was in the act of booking his passage for New York. Subsequently he was tried in the village court in Oposura, and, under the name of Rodriguez, was sentenced to penal servitude for the term of his natural life.

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