

# **MATEO FALCONE**

A One-Act Play

by

B. K. De Fabris

Adapted from the short story by Prosper Mérimée

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Running time: 15 min.

Casting: 6 men, 1 woman, 1 boy

Mateo Falcone is a disturbing and provoking tale of inexorable justice. Some say that it is the saddest story in the world.

A ten-year boy dishonors his family by committing a treason. The ten year old boy, Fortunato accepts a silver coin to hide Gianetto, the outlaw in their house. However, when an officer offers him a gold watch to reveal where he has hidden the outlaw, he takes it as well, revealing the hiding place of the villain.

The wretched father, a proud Corsican highlander named Mateo Falcone, cannot but do what seems to him his duty. When Mateo arrives home and finds out what his son has done, he knows that the family's honour has been destroyed. The only solution he can see to retrieve it is to kill his only son, after allowing him to say a final prayer for his soul. Fortunato's distraught mother is not able to do anything to save the boy.

The original story was written by French author Prosper Mérimée. It was first published in 1829 and has since been considered as one of the best short stories ever.

**CHARACTERS:**

FORTUNATO, a ten-year old boy

*(This part could be played by an actress dressed as a boy.)*

GIANETTO, an outlaw

MATEO, a highlander, Fortunato's father

GIUSEPPA, Fortunato's mother

THE ADJUTANT

FIRST SOLDIER

SECOND SOLDIER

Time: Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Place: Corsica.

The set: A pile of hay and some farming tools.

*SCENE – A pile of hay close by a stone-wall. Some farming tools are scattered around the place.*

*(FORTUNATO is tranquilly stretched out in the sun when the firing of a musket interrupts his meditations. The boy gets up and turns to that side whence the noise came. Other shots follow, fired at irregular intervals. The boy instantly grabs a spade and hides himself behind a bundle of straw.*

*GIANETTO appears, dragging himself along with difficulty with the support of his gun. His thigh is bleeding. He stops and looks to the spade that moves above the straw.)*

**GIANETTO:** You are the son of Mateo Falcone?

*(FORTUNATO comes out from his weak shelter.)*

**FORTUNATO:** Yes. *(He leans on his spade and gazes at the man.)*

**GIANETTO:** I am Gianetto Saupiero. I am followed by the Gendarmes. Hide me, for I can go no farther.

**FORTUNATO:** And what will my father say if I hide you without his permission?

**GIANETTO:** He will say that you have done well.

**FORTUNATO:** How do you know?

**GIANETTO:** Hide me quickly; they are coming.

**FORTUNATO:** Wait till my father gets back.

**GIANETTO:** How can I wait? Malediction! They will be here in five minutes. Come, hide me, or I will kill you.

**FORTUNATO:** *(With the utmost coolness.)* Your gun is empty, and there are no more cartridges in your belt.

**GIANETTO:** I have my stiletto.

**FORTUNATO:** But can you run as fast as I can? *(He gives a leap and put himself out of reach, leaving the spade next to the haystack.)*

**GIANETTO:** You are not the son of Mateo Falcone! Will you then let me be captured before your house?

**FORTUNATO:** *(Coming nearer.)* What will you give me if I hide you?

*(GIANETTO pulls out of his pocket a five-franc piece. FORTUNATO smiles at the sight of the silver piece and snatches it.)*

**FORTUNATO:** Fear nothing.

*(He immediately makes a great hole in a pile of hay. GIANETTO crouches down in it and FORTUNATO covers him. Then the boy again stretches himself out in the sun. A few moments afterwards an ADJUTANT and two SOLDIERS appear.)*

**THE ADJUTANT:** *(Approaching FORTUNATO.)* Good day, little cousin, how tall you have grown. Have you seen a man go past here just now?

**FORTUNATO:** *(With a simple air.)* Oh! I am not yet so tall as you, my cousin.

**THE ADJUTANT:** You soon will be. But haven't you seen a man go by here, tell me?

**FORTUNATO:** If I have seen a man go by?

**THE ADJUTANT:** Yes, a man with a pointed hat of black velvet, and a vest embroidered with red and yellow.

**FORTUNATO:** A man with a pointed hat, and a vest embroidered with red and yellow?

**THE ADJUTANT:** Yes, answer quickly, and don't repeat my questions?

**FORTUNATO:** This morning the priest passed before our door on his horse Piero. He asked me how papa was, and I answered him.

**THE ADJUTANT:** Ah, you little scoundrel, you are playing sly! Tell me quickly which way Gianetto went? We are looking for him, and I am sure he took this path.

**FORTUNATO:** Who knows?

**THE ADJUTANT:** Who knows? It is I know that you have seen him.

**FORTUNATO:** Can any one see who passes when they are asleep?

**THE ADJUTANT:** You were not asleep, rascal; the shooting woke you up.

**FORTUNATO:** Then you believe, cousin, that your guns make so much noise? My father's carbine has the advantage of them.

**THE ADJUTANT:** The devil take you, you cursed little scapegrace! I am certain that you have seen Gianetto. Perhaps, even, you have hidden him. Come, comrades, go into the house and see if our man is there. He could only go on one foot, and the knave has too much good sense to try to reach the *mâquis* limping like that. Moreover, the bloody tracks stop here.

**FORTUNATO:** *(With a sneer.)* And what will papa say? What will he say if he knows that his house has been entered while he was away?

**THE ADJUTANT:** *(Taking him by the ear.)* You rascal! Do you know that it only remains for me to make you change your tone? Perhaps you will speak differently after I have given you twenty blows with the flat of my sword.

**FORTUNATO:** *(Continues to sneer.)* My father is Mateo Falcone.

**THE ADJUTANT:** You little scamp, you know very well that I can carry you off to Corte or to Bastia. I will make you lie in a dungeon, on straw, with your feet in shackles, and I will have you guillotined if you don't tell me where Gianetto is.

*(FORTUNATO bursts out laughing.)*

**FORTUNATO:** My father is Mateo Falcone.

**FIRST SOLDIER:** *(In a low voice.)* Adjutant, let us have no quarrels with Mateo.

**THE ADJUTANT:** Search the place!

*(The FIRST SOLDIER briefly goes offstage. The SECOND SOLDIER approaches the pile of hay and gives the pile a careless thrust with his bayonet. The boy's face betrays not the slightest emotion.)*

**THE ADJUTANT:** My little cousin, you are a very wide-awake little fellow. You will get along. But you are playing a naughty game with me; and if I wasn't afraid of making trouble for my cousin, Mateo, the devil take me! but I would carry you off with me.

**FORTUNATO:** Bah!

**THE ADJUTANT:** But when my cousin comes back I shall tell him about this, and he will whip you till the blood comes for having told such lies.

**FORTUNATO:** You don't say so!

**THE ADJUTANT:** You will see. But hold on!—be a good boy and I will give you something.

**FORTUNATO:** Cousin, let me give you some advice: if you wait much longer the knave will be in the *mâquis* and it will take a smarter man than you to follow him.

*(The ADJUTANT takes from his pocket a silver watch. FORTUNATO'S eyes sparkle at the sight of it. The ADJUTANT holds the watch by the end of its chain.)*

**THE ADJUTANT:** Rascal! you would like to have such a watch as that hung around your neck, wouldn't you, and to walk in the streets of Porto-Vecchio proud as a peacock? People would ask you what time it was, and you would say: 'Look at my watch.'

**FORTUNATO:** When I am grown up, my uncle, the Caporal, will give me a watch.

**THE ADJUTANT:** Yes; but your uncle's little boy has one already; not so fine as this either. But then, he is younger than you.

*(FORTUNATO sighs.)*

**THE ADJUTANT:** Well! Would you like this watch, little cousin?

**FORTUNATO:** Why do you make fun of me?

**THE ADJUTANT:** Good God! I am not making fun of you. Only tell me where Gianetto is and the watch is yours.

*(FORTUNATO smiles incredulously fixing his eyes on those of the ADJUTANT.)*

**THE ADJUTANT:** May I lose my epaulettes if I do not give you the watch on this condition. These comrades are witnesses; I can not deny it.

*(While speaking the ADJUTANT gradually holds the watch nearer till it almost touches the boy's face.)*

*FORTUNATO finally raises his hand and points over his shoulder with his thumb at the haystack. The ADJUTANT understands him at once. He drops the end of the chain and FORTUNATO finds himself the sole possessor of the watch. The SOLDIERS begin at once to overturn the pile.*