

## *The Counterfeit Detective*

IN THE SPRING OF 1854 I was traveling Kansas correspondent for a Cincinnati paper, as well as an occasional jotter for the St. Louis journals. In my perambulations from one place to another—wherever there was excitement—and everybody will remember that it was exciting times—I became pretty well acquainted with all the desperate characters, thieves and gamblers—whose name was legion—that traversed the forests, or haunted the settlements.

As everybody in that unhappy territory in those times was of a migratory character—driven from one place to another by the political antagonism of the locality—these rough and dangerous characters were ruled by the same master—public opinion, and usually traveled with the tide.

One of them soon made himself conspicuous as a leader of a desperate band of marauders, who pillaged every poor emigrant party that fell into their hands, and evading every retribution by attributing their villainous deeds to the opposite party to which their victims belonged. This man's name was Jack Watson; but he was commonly called "the Shooter," and rumor said—and I fear with truth—that he had left many a good man and true to bleach upon the plains of Kansas. He had, also, a great reputation as a "shaver," or counterfeit passer, and the constant flow of emigrants to that quarter offered him a rich harvest of profit in his favorite profession.

Watson had received his "walking papers" several times at Fort Leavenworth, which he always implicitly obeyed for the nonce, but soon managed to return whenever any public excitement was likely to detract attention from his presence.

It was on one of these occasions of party strife that a man was mysteriously shot down just at dusk, and no one could tell the author of the deed. It was soon reported, however, that the "Shooter" was in town, and the excited populace at once commenced a search for him. I was compelled to leave that evening for St. Louis on business, and left the town in the midst of the excitement. The *Belle Britton* had been about an hour on her journey, and I had satisfied my curiosity among the passengers on deck, when I stepped into the cabin; several tables were, as usual, surrounded by card-players, presenting that invariable, but never-to-be-understood anomaly, of greenhorns and country champions trying their strength against wily and unprincipled "sharper." But the first person who arrested my attention was none other than Jack Watson, *alias* "the Shooter."

It is needless for me to inform anyone who traveled the river in those times that it would have been folly for me to have attempted his arrest, or even to hint that I knew anything of his character. It would have been certain death; besides, as I have always had a queer way of minding my own business, I followed my usual policy on this occasion.

Drawing near the table where he was playing, a glance at the pile of notes which lay beside him informed me they were bogus bills on the Springfield, Illinois Bank. But upon looking at the funds of his opponent—a small, compact man, with iron features, and a calm black eye—I was also struck with their appearance. They were all new, and of a particular stamp, which I recognized as that of the Bank of St. Anthony, Minnesota.

The game proceeded briskly. Bets run high, and, as the enthusiasm increased, quite a crowd gathered round the table to witness the result. Watson was in ecstasy, as hand after hand he drew the new, clean bills toward him, and ever and anon changed a fifty, giving his worthless notes in lieu. The man with the iron face remained perfectly calm, but a close observer could discover a sly twinkle playing in the corners of his eyes, and now and then his lips would quiver.

“I fear you are my master, sir,” said the stranger, at last, as he paused to count over his bills.

“Not at all,” said “Shooter,” quickly; “I’m very little winner. Come, again; luck will change—always does.”

“I’ll tell you what I will do,” said the calm stranger, speaking very slowly, like a desperate man; “you’ve won plenty considerable, and I just lack seventeen dollars here of making five hundred; if you’ll show me a chance, by staking the even money against the deficit, we will play one game, and the last, for the entire amount.”

“Well, I’ll be liberal; come on,” said the “Shooter,” with an air of assumed carelessness; and he put up stakes in his Illinois counterfeits, putting the new bills in his pocket.

The game was played, and, contrary to all expectation, the stranger won. Watson insisted on another trial, but the stranger shook his head, and calmly pocketed the stakes. It was then that the devil began to rise in Watson’s heart, and flash in his sinister eyes. Leaning his elbows on the table, and clasping his hands before him, he bent forward, and fixing his malicious gaze upon the stranger, who leaned carelessly back in his chair, he said, in a deep, meaning tone—

“Stranger, you’ve won my money, and now refuse to show me a chance for it. We don’t do things that way on the river.”

“Will you please inform me who you mean, sir, by ‘we?’” asked the stranger, glancing carelessly around.

“I mean we river boys; or, if you please, I don’t do business in that way,” said Watson, with a sneer.

“But I do,” said the stranger, as he coolly lit a segar. Watson intuitively raised his hand to his breast, as though for a weapon, but he seemed to think better of it, and resuming his former taunting position, while a triumphant smile circled his lips, he said:

“I hope you’ll find those bills all right, stranger.”

“Do not fear that I will be disappointed in them,” said the stranger, “I am well acquainted with the officers of the Springfield Bank. By the way, you had better examine those that you won of me.”

“Oh, I know the face of a St. Anthony bill,” chuckled the “Shooter,” jerking them from his pocket.

“And the officers’ signatures, too?” asked the stranger quickly.

Watson started back aghast, as he opened out a bill, and looked closely at it.

“Hell and furies!” he shouted— “the bills are not signed at all!”

“Exactly,” said the stranger, with a smile.

Watson stood for a moment looking from the note to the stranger in utter confusion, not knowing what to do. At last he exclaimed:

“Who the devil are you?”

The stranger rose calmly, and with a bow of mock courtesy, replied:

“Edward Bonny, at your service.”

The crowd fell back at that name, for it was familiar to every Westerner.

“What!” cried the sharper, “the—the great Western—”

“Counterfeit Detective!” thundered Bonny; and before Watson could move a hand, he threw himself upon him like a whirlwind, hurled him to the floor, and in a moment the wretch was in irons!

“I’ve been trailing you for a long time, Mr. Watson,” said Bonny, as he allowed the sharper to rise. “But I could not catch you out of Kansas, and my writ would not reach you there.”

“Bonny, we’re running into the landing!” cried the captain.

“All right,” replied the Detective; and in a few moments he was landed with his prisoner.

I met Bonny the following winter at the Sherman House, Chicago, where he was laying for some “land-rats,” and asked him the fate of “the Shooter.”

“Doing service for the State,” he replied, smiling. “He begged hard when he ‘went up’ that he might be put in the engraver’s department, but they concluded paper milling would be equally as beneficial, and he is faithfully at work.”

Bonny was death on the sharpers. I may sometime tell you how he came by those St. Anthony bills.

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