

## *The Detective's Story*

A man, coming through on the Western train, stopped in our city. Nothing remarkable about that: neither was there anything remarkable about the man. He was dressed in loose, dark clothes; wore his hair and beard long, and a broad Mexican hat on his head; in short, had just the appearance of what he professed to be—a California miner, washed up and just out from the “diggings.”

He took lodgings at a quiet hotel. booked himself as James L. Snyder. His manners were unobtrusive, and had everything connected with him so perfectly common-place as to suggest the idea expressed by the landlord:

“Clever fellow enough! But as to smartness—between you and I, he will never set the river on fire!”

Well, Mr. James L. Snyder lingered, and looked about for upward of a week, and then announced his intention of “settling down.” He made a partial bargain for some real estate; had some talk of taking shares in a railroad just going through; and thus it transpired that he was a man of means.

About this time he took the landlord so far into his confidence as to impart a little anxiety he felt respecting his capital. His “pile” was just as he had made it, being all in “dust”; and as the amount was considerable, he doubted being able to exchange it at any of our banks.

The landlord, who was a good-natured fellow, and withal a man of some influence, offered to go with him to the principal one, which he did, Snyder carrying a specimen of his “dust” in a small bottle.

The cashier, who was attending to business during the absence of the president, gave great encouragement respecting the exchange, but as he felt a great responsibility resting upon himself, wished to retain the specimen, and postpone his reply until the next day.

Snyder readily complied with this proposition, expressed a deal of quiet satisfaction at the prospect of so easily changing his “dust” into available capital.

The specimen being duly tested, and proving to be a pure article, the cashier's reply, next day was a favorable one; and Snyder, going directly to the hotel, brought back the “dust” in a chamois-skin bag, and was counted out at its market value in bank notes and coin, to the amount of eight thousand dollars.

While the dust was being weighed, Snyder recollected that he had promised, as a curiosity, to send a little to his brother, living out in Indiana, and asked for a small vial to put it up in, whereupon the cashier returned him his own specimen, its contents untouched.

A little later in the day, one of the professors of the University, who was quite a noted chemist, happened in at the bank, heard Knox, the cashier, speaking of his speculation on his gold dust.

“Gold dust!” he said. “Have you any objections to show me the color of it? ‘

“Certainly not. Oh, it’s all right! I had a specimen thoroughly tested before I bargained to take it.”

Half an hour after, Knox burst into my room, like a man bereft of his senses.

‘For God’s sake, P—n, get up here and help me! If you don’t, I’m a ruined, desperate man!’”

“In Heaven’s name, what have you been doing, man?” I asked in astonishment.

“I’ve been fooled, seduced, swindled! I’ve burst the bank! I’ve ruined myself and everybody else!”

“Come, come!” I said soothingly—for I saw he was quite wild with excitement “I am sure it isn’t so bad as that. I am ready and willing to help you, but you must cool down and tell me just what’s up and all about it.”

Partly by persuasion and partly by force, I got him down in a chair, and managed to pump the whole story out of him.

Tchadd had been testing some of the “dust,” and the test failed; he tried again and again, then the secret came out; the whole lot was worthless, tinsel dross.

“How many people know this?” I asked.

“Only Tchadd, myself, and you.”

“Then keep quiet and tell him to. President Brown will not be back until next week. Keep your own counsel, and I have a presentiment we will straighten out this tangled snarl before then.”

I sauntered around to the hotel, and inquired for Snyder. He had not been back since he had went down to sell his “dust.”

“Did he leave any luggage in his room?” I asked.

“No; he bought only a valise, and carried the gold in it to the bank.”

I made various inquiries about town and ascertained to a dead certainty what I was convinced of, viz: that Snyder had “sloped.”

I was confident that he had taken the train West, which started out about fifteen minutes after he had received his money at the bank. He had played too sharp a game to be a mere novice at getting out of the trap after he had taken the bait.

Another train was to start out in an hour, and purchasing a ticket through to Omaha, I made the best use of my time in getting ready for my trip and making some needful inquiries. To the landlord I am indebted for a minute description of the man's person.

He was about five feet eight inches in height, and thick set, though his loose garments rather added to that effect; his hair and beard were jet black; and, what was unusual for a person of so dark complexion, his eyes were a pale grayish-blue; at the extreme corner of his left eye was a small red scar, and, on the back of his right hand, a large hairy mole.

When the Western train started out, you might have seen a greenish looking countryman, in farmer's dress, with a big, high-colored overcoat, a red neck-shawl, and drab felt hat, with a cotton umbrella in one hand, and a valise in another, waving an adieu to Knox, who stood on the platform. Had you taken the trouble to examine a card attached to the handle of the aforesaid valise, you would have seen, in an awkward, cramped hand, the euphonious title. "*Josiah Stebbins. His Valise.*" I presume it is needless to mention that this individual was myself.

As a matter of course, I was rather a moving planet. I followed the conductor through the train, innocently scrutinizing the occupants of each car as I passed along. When we stopped—which was only at important stations, as I was on the lightning express—I managed to see what new passengers came on.

Right in front of me sat a most artistically-gotten-up-model of the present fashionable woman. Heavy rings adorned her ungloved fingers, and a good many lengths of gold chain were fastened at her throat and belt, supporting a cluster of glittering "charms" upon her breast. I have no faculty for describing the mysterious details of a lady's costume, and can only say that this one, from the gaily gilt heel-taps of her "No, 2" gaiters to the exquisite pink of her delicately-rogued checks, was legibly written over—"In the market."

I saw her lip take a contemptuous curl as I seated myself in her rear; but when the news-boy came through the train with pop corn, and stopped for me to purchase, the sight of a well filled pocket book some what altered her regards. The next time I caught her eye she gave me a seductive smile, which I returned with a sheepish grin, timidly offering her part of the corn which I sat verdantly munching.

She honored me by accepting, thanked me sweetly, and, by way of opening a conversation, asked "if I knew how far it was to the next station?"

I told her no, but hoped it was right smart way, if she had to get off there.

She said she was going further than that and asked me how far I was going.

Whereupon I proceeded to tell her that my name was Josiah Stebbins; that my dad had got the biggest farm in southern Indiany, and raised more hogs than she could shake a stick at; that I'd been up to Chicago to fetch some pigs to market, had got their spondulix in my wallet, and was going to Omaha, to see the fun, and to spree it a little.

The strange lady said she was going to Omaha, too, and was delighted to find so agreeable company.

Our conversation was here interrupted by the stoppage of the train at a station. It was now dusk, and the lamps were lighted. A solitary passenger came on, and got in our car.

His appearance, revealed by the lamp light, might be aptly termed as “stunning.”

He was of medium height, with broad shoulders and a tapered waist. He was dressed in an elegant broad cloth suit, of the latest cut; a “stove-pipe” hat on his head, and a slender cane in his hand; while a profusion of showy jewelry was distributed about his person. He had a pale complexion, close-cut auburn hair, a shadow of a mustache on his upper lip, and pale blue eyes.

I saw him glance hesitatingly at the half-vacant seat of my fair acquaintance before he deposited himself gingerly on the one in front; but she gave him no encouragement. She evidently supposed him, like the generality of his class, to be out of pocket.

When the conductor came through the new passenger had no ticket; but, after displaying a handful of coin, he pulled out a prodigious roll of bank notes from which to pay his fare.

From that time, my Dulcinea had no smiles for me. There commenced a series of delicate maneuvers, which culminated in my gentleman coming back into my lady’s seat.

Their acquaintance progressed rapidly. His arm, which at first rested respectfully upon the back of the seat, slipped protectingly around her unresisting waist. Both faces were close together, and their murmuring conversation was drowned by the rattle of the wheels.

But presently the tableau changed.

Disengaging herself from the embracing arm, the lady turned again to me.

“I must tell you how fortunate I am,” she said, with frank simplicity. “I find this gentleman is a friend of my friends, and is going through to Omaha. Shall I introduce him to you?”

Taking consent for granted, she presented her companion as:

“Mr. St. James.”

That gentleman gave me a very patronizing bow; professed to be quite at home in Omaha, which he designated as the place of residence of a certain cloven-footed gentleman, at present unmentionable, and said he would be pleased to show me some sports, as my fair friend had informed him that this was my first visit.

Of course I signified that all this would be extremely gratifying to me, and appeared quite overawed by his splendor and his condescension. Upon this he became more familiar, and when

I adventured to admire a certain ring he wore, he took it from his finger, that I might examine it more closely.

As he removed the ring I noticed a peculiar mark on his right hand; a glance at his face, and the chance game became one in dead earnest. I had fancied I was taking in tow a 'decoy,' by means of which I hoped to track up and worry down my game. I became now convinced that the game itself was now in my hands.

I turned the ring over and over, handling it with awkward curiosity.

"Now, I suppose," I said, admiringly, "that this ring's real genuine California gold?"

"It is said to be," replied its owner, nonchalantly.

"Have you ever been to California?" I asked, wonderingly.

"I have," he answered, somewhat pompously.

I came out in a sudden burst of enthusiasm:

"I do believe I'll just put her right through to Sanfrisco! I swan I will! I've got the greenbacks, and dad can't help himself! I wan't to see the gold in great, big chunks, jest as they dig it out of the hill. All the sand there's full of little fine slivers, ain't it?"

"Yes; gold dust, like this in the vial."

And he drew from his pocket the identical bottle I had heard so minutely described. I affected to be overwhelmed with amazement, and declared my intention of "going through if it took a leg!"

Soon, however, on pretense of sleepiness, I withdrew from the society of my companions, and affected to fall into a doze.

I waited until I saw them lapsing into forgetfulness, and then, leaving my valise and umbrella on my seat, went out into the rear car, where the conductor was. A benevolent-faced old gentleman, who was sitting near me, arose and followed me.

"Pardon me, friend," he said, tapping me on the shoulder, "but you seem unacquainted with the world, and I feel it my duty to warn you against these people you have just been talking with. They are professional sharpers, and are aiming to get away with your money."

With a smile and a bow I gave him my card, and passed on. I made arrangements with the conductor to send out a dispatch to the next office we came to, to be forwarded to our next regular stopping place. Then I returned to my seat. My absence seemed not to have been noticed, and I resumed my reclining position.

As soon as the train had stopped, two uniforms stepped on board; a signal and we were ready for duty.

Laying a hand on my gentleman's shoulder, I said:

“I have a warrant to arrest this man on charge of robbery, committed this morning, on the First National Bank in N—city.”

He was completely surprised out of all resistance, and submitted as quietly as a lamb. Nearly the whole amount of booty was found upon his person. He was duly tried, sentenced, and paid the penalty of his crime.

In his confession he stated that this bogus dust was, in effect, powdered oroide thinly washed in gold. After receiving the money, he had stepped into an out building, removing his false wig and beard, exchanged hats, and thrown over his costume a large Spanish cloak, which he had in his valise, and so disguised had taken the train. At a suitable distance out he had stepped over a train, in order to more fully complete his metamorphosis.

The unhappy Knox was entirely restored to equilibrium, and still enjoys the confidence of his employers. I have never learned how our lady friend got through to Omaha.

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