

*The Coiners of Kansas*  
A THRILLING SHETCH

Several years ago, and shortly after the remonetization of silver, counterfeiting received a wonderful impetus, and the West and South especially were flooded with bogus coin.

The large floating population and the wilderness of the border country rendered the task of unearthing the coiners a hard one, but after several seasons of persistent and stealthy work, the United States Detective Service became satisfied as to the location of at least one gang of the "Sharps;" and Jack Densmore, an experienced agent, was instructed to visit the State (Kansas), ingratiate himself with the counterfeiters, and learn of their haunts and habits.

The duty was a dangerous one, but the man selected to perform it had faced danger, and even death, too often among Eastern criminals to hesitate a moment; and so it happened that, upon a certain hazy September evening, Densmore, disguised as a Dutch peddler, dropped from the westward-bound train on the K. P. Road, at the little station of Black Wolf, in Kansas. For a moment he gazed after the retreating cars, then turned, and in broken English inquired of the station agent the route to Wildwood Tavern.

"I vas what you call sthrange mit dis part de koundry," said the peddler, smiling; "but a frient ov mine up de river, he say go to Vildwood Tavern, und you sold lots of goots in dot koundry."

"Wall, Duchy, I don't reckon you'll do much trade, but I ken tell you the road, if yer goin."

So saying, the rough Westerner gave the necessary directions, and, in the gloaming, Densmore disappeared.

"I'll try every house from here to Wildwood," muttered he, when out of hearing, "but I'll find Price's. That's the name—Price. And when that's found, look out! If I can capture Dick Price, my fortune's made."

A 9 o'clock Carl—for so he called himself—sought shelter at a settler's cabin by the roadside, and paid for a supper, lodging and breakfast with gaudy lace. At noon he paused again to eat and trade, and again many times during the afternoon. Before night he had heard the name of Price; and before night, too, several pieces of counterfeit coin had been passed upon him. He was nearing his game.

It was a little after sundown, and with weary tread Densmore was climbing up a long hill, where the struggling road was fringed with bushes and woods, when a step startled him, and a moment later a slender boy was at his side.

"How you vas, little feller?" said the detective. "Does vas a nice noight?"

“Yes, sir,” said the youth, looking at him sharply. “Where are you going!”

“Me goin? O, I vas goin’ to sell de tings in mine pack. I vas goin’ to git rich,” and the peddler chuckled.

“No I mean to-night. Where are you going to stay?” said the boy. “This road stops in the woods here.”

Densmore paused.

“De road stops! Py schimminy! Den dot road got himself lost at de las’ turn. I t’ought dis road went fro’ dese voods to de place you calls de tavern, hey?”

“O, you mean the Wildwood Tavern? That’s over that way,” and the boy pointed into the darkness. “It’s five miles from here.”

“Py schimminy!” sighed poor Carl; “five miles! I neffer get dare to-night. I sleep mit dese woods,” and he began to unpack his strap.

The boy eyed him again sharply. Then he said: “No, you needn’t sleep in the woods. I live at the end of this road. Come with me. You can stay at our house, I guess.”

“Ah, dot vas a good poy,” said Dutchy, gladly. “Dot vas nice; und I get some supper, too, don’t it?”

“I reckon,” replied the boy.

Reshouldering his pack, the two continued to follow the road, the youth leading, until, half a mile further on, a cabin appeared in the shadows.

“Here’s my house,” said the guide. “Go to the door, and I’ll run and tell father,” and he disappeared toward the barn.

Densmore looked sharply about him. This was Price’s. A long, low cabin, strongly built, with small barred windows, a barn back of it, dreary woods upon all sides. A regular den. The detective shuddered.

“A bad hole; yet he’s the chief. If I can catch him, with the dies, it will destroy the gang.”

Then with a resolution to succeed or perish he slowly moved toward the door.

As he raised his hand to knock, it was suddenly opened. A heavily-built, heavily bearded woodsman stood before him—a man with skill and cunning in his face, and a desperate, threatening courage in his eyes—a devil to dare, a giant to do—Dick Price. He glowed upon the peddler, shading the flickering torch he held in one brawny hand, while his piercing glance searched Densmore’s face.

“What d’ye want?”

“You vas de leetle poy’s pa? Dot vas goot. I want some’tings to eat and some’tings to sleep. De leetle poy said so.” And, with simple naturalness, Carl pushed aside the mighty door-man, entered the cabin, threw his pack upon the floor, and with a sigh of relief, dropped onto a low bench near the fire. “Ah, dot vas goot.”

For an instant anger flamed in Price’s face; but before he could speak, a back door opened, and a woman, young, lithe and charming, entered, and, with a glance at the man before her, said, “Ah, this is the peddler Will spoke to me of. He lost his way, dear,” she continued, going to Price, and laying her hand upon his arm; “and Will met him on the road, and asked him to stay with us to-night. It’s all right.”

The passion died from the man’s face; the voice of the woman thrilled Carl. This girl and the boy who had guided him were one. She was the spy of the gang.

“So yer a peddler, eh?” said the host, advancing, “an’ lost yer way? Wall, yer welcome to our fire and fare; but I tell ye a little more ceremony well be better with Dick Price next time. I was nigh shakin’ ye!” and he smiled grimly.

Carl smiled, too, childlike and bland, and said “Yaw.” The host and his companion were amused.

“Where’s the boy?” asked Price.

“He went to the barn,” replied the woman, as she busied herself preparing the evening meal. “He was too tired to eat, and will not be in to-night.”

Carl was sure now that the woman and the boy were one.

A plain but plentiful supper was served, after which the peddler and his host drew before the open fire with their pipes. Naturally, the conversation turned upon trade, and Dutchy very willingly told of his success, and even showed the silver which he had gathered during the day. Price picked a piece of it from his hand.

“This ere’s bad,” said he.

“Vat! Pad?” and Carl leaned forward excited. “Oh, you vas foolin’,” he continued, examining the coin. “Dis vill pass.”

“It may pass, but it’s counterfeit, all the same,” said Price. “I’m sure of it.”

“Vell, neffer mind. It’s good enough for me,” said the peddler, with a smile. “I only vish I had a t’ousand dollars mit it.”

“Wall, I reckon ye could get it,” said Price, resuming his pipe. “I heard a feller say to-day that thar war lost o’ it around.”

“Py schimminy! I vould like to get it,” said his companion. “It vas goot effery vare I go.”

“I know a feller what’s got some of the stuff,” said Price, in a low tone; “but he lives a mile from here. Ye could buy it o’ him, I reckon.”

“For how much?” said Carl.

“Oh, may be one-half,” returned the other. “I can’t say. It’s bad stuff to deal with, ye know, and I never touch it.”

“One-half! You mean two dollars for one? Py schimminy! I will give two hundred tollars for four, and get myself rich!” cried the peddler.

Price smiled.

“But how kin ye pay for it?”

“Never mind. I know,” said Carl. “Show me de fellow what got it to sell, und I pay him mit it.”

“Wall,” said the host rising, “I find him for ye in the mornin’. Do you want to turn in?”

“Turn in?”

“Go ter bed—ter sleep, I mean.”

“Oh, yaw! I was tired myself oud to-night.”

A moment’s consultation with the woman, and Price called the peddler to follow. Carl picked up his pack, and climbed the ladder that led to the loft. There was a shake-down on the floor.

“Thar! It’s not the finest bed-room in the world, but ye’ll sleep,” said Price, laughing. “Good-night.”

“Good-night,” returned Carl.

The other disappeared. Densmore heaved a sigh.

“It’s hard work playing Dutch,” he muttered.

Then he opened his pack, and from it drew two heavy revolvers, a bowie knife, three pairs of handcuffs, and the star of the United States Secret Service.

“I may have work before morning,” thought he, “and these are good bed-fellows.”

He removed his coat, blew out the candle, and lay down. His mind busy with the events of the day and in forming some plan for the morrow.

While thus engaged, the sound of a door stealthily opened attracted his attention, and a moment later he heard men’s voices below. Quietly leaving his bed, he crept to a knot-hole in the floor and listened.

“But the peddler?”

It was the woman’s voice.

“Never mind him,” replied Price. “Ned,” he continued, apparently addressing the new comer, “We’ve a customer up stairs—a Dutch peddler—and he wants four hundred. I’ll bring him to ye in the morning. He’ll buy—”

The door opened a second time. Pressing his face close to the floor, Densmore found that he could both see and hear. Three sharp-looking, roughly dressed men entered.

“Ha! All here,” said Price, in a low tone. “That is good. I want half a thousand o’ the queer to-night, for we kin send to the Tavern to-morrow, and the chap up above wants some. Did you bring the dies, Bray?”

The man addressed shook his head.

“I haven’t been home, an’ jest come from Elkhorn. Send Nettie. My old woman will give ‘em to her.”

Price turned to the girl.

“Are you afraid to go, Net?”

“Afraid?” she laughed, and touched her bosom, just drawing the butt of a pistol into sight—“afraid, Dick? You know better than that.”

“Wall, my gal, if ye go to Bray’s an’ git the dies, it will help us; for, while the boys are coining, I will stay on watch, and mill the hundred we ran yesterday. Ye’ll be back in an hour?”

“Yes, dear.”

And throwing a heavy cloak about her, and incasing her head in a deep hood, the girl opened the door and disappeared into the night.

Price turned to the gang.

“Boys go below, fire up, and prepare the rest o’ the metal. I’ll stay here an’ when Net comes in with the dies we’ll coin. I want a full load to-night, for we’re almost out. Here, give me a lift.”

As he ceased speaking, he seized a heavy iron bar and thrust it beneath the hearthstone. The others joined hands with him, and, with desperate effort the five slowly raised the great stone. Beneath it appeared a door, secured by long, iron bolts. These being shot, and the trap raised, a flight of steps was seen. The four strangers descended, carrying a lantern, and Price dropped the door behind them. Then opening a sort of hidden closet, he drew from it a box of rough silver coin and a milling machine, with which he began to work.

Densmore breathed hard.

“Trapped!” he whispered—“trapped! The gang complete! And now for *work*.”

Noiselessly he arose and approached the ladder. In either pocket were his pistols, and in his hand a pair of bracelets, on his breast his star. At the top of the ladder he paused, struck his foot against the floor, and coughed. There was a quick stir below.

“Mr. Brice! Mr. Brice! Vas you dere?”

A half-growl from below answered him:

“What ye want?”

“I vas sick, Mr. Brice—I was so hot as neffer vas. I vant a leetle vater, Mr. Brice, if you please, Mr. Brice.”

“What the—” then came an oath. “Lie still, ye Dutch fool, and I’ll bring ye water. Don’t come here.”

“O, no, Mr. Brice! But some vater, Mr. Brice, for God’s sake! I vas burned alive!”

There was a moving about the room, a patter of dipper and pail, and Price approached the ladder. Densmore breathed hard. The steps came nearer; they mounted the ladder. He crouched, waiting. An instant more, and the bearded face of Price appeared above the opening in the floor, and his right hand was raised, holding a tin cup of water.

“Here, Dutchy—you’re so cursed hard to take care of—here’s yer drink.”

Carl’s arm was outstretched; but as he touched the dipper, there came a sharp click, and the handcuff closed about the wrist of the coiner, and, at the same moment, the cold

muzzle of a heavy Colt's revolver pressed against his forehead, and the voice of the detective hissed in his very ear:

“Not a sound, or I'll kill you! Up with your other hand.”

The man was fairly caught, and he knew it. The color fled from his bronzed face, leaving it ashen-hued; a cold sweat gathered in beads upon his brow; the prison doors yawned before him; but one glance into the deep eyes of the detective were enough, and with a shudder and a groan he allowed the handcuffs to be clasped about his other wrist.

“And now go down; without noise, too,” said Densmore, “or—”

Price obeyed; and, as he turned upon the floor below, the detective was at his side.

“Sit there,” and he pointed toward the table, “with your back to the door.”

Again the coiner obeyed, bowing his head upon his hands. Then Densmore crept to the trap, closed it, and shot the heavy bolts.

Without raising his head, Price whispered:

“They'll smother.”

“They must run their chances,” replied Densmore, coldly.

So saying, he crept near to the cabin door, and waited. He must have the woman, the spy, the last and best of all the gang.

The moments passed; the hour was drawing to a close, and the detective listened with bated breath for his coming victim, when suddenly, without a sound, the door opened, and Nettie entered. As she did so, Densmore stepped forward, and would have laid his hand upon her shoulder, but, in a single glance, the girl comprehended all, and with a wild shriek she sprang from him, the dies dropping from her arms as she did so, while Price started from his seat and joined her. And then again the detective found himself facing his enemies, one of them now armed, for the woman had drawn a pistol.

But there was no struggle. With nerves tense as steel, and a deadly light in the clear, blue eyes, Carl levelled his heavy weapons, one at each of the figures before him, and in low, cool tones said:

“Up with your hands! In the name of the national government, I arrest you as counterfeiters! Quick!”

The last word was addressed to the woman, for in her eyes, too, there gleamed a dangerous light; but, before the detective could stay her, the pistol was turned, there rang out a sharp report, and from her side welled the bright blood, splashing the wooden floor,

and, with a moaning cry, she tottered and fell, Price half catching her in his shackled arms as she sank.

Only once she spoke:

“Better this than a prison, Dick! And to die with you, *love*.”

Then came a fluttering sigh and she was gone.

An hour later, Densmore stood before the United States Commissioner at Wildwood, and delivered his prisoner. Two hours later, a posse of officers secured the others, who were dragged half dead from the cellar-furnace room; and the next day the detective alone stood by the open grave of poor Nettie, “the bravest and prettiest criminal he had ever known,” he said, and heard the dull sound of clods as the fell upon her coffin. Then he turned eastward again, his duty done.

The coiners of Kansas were no more.

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