

# A Shattered Romance

A True Story of the Secret Service

By COL. H. C. WHITLEY, Former Chief U. S. Secret Service

**T**HE professional criminal's brain is a constantly working laboratory of the most ingenious plots for over-reaching the officers of the law. Ever awake, ever thoughtful, and ever active—at glaring noontide as well as at black midnight—in the brown-stone front and lowly tenement—everywhere and at every

hour is this insidious enemy of social order wide awake and on the alert. It takes an acute mind and level head to contend against and bring the ingenious criminal to the bar of justice. During our civil war counterfeiting blossomed into a fine art. It became almost omnipresent in every channel of trade and the government detectives were impotent to totally eradicate the evil, expose the plots and defeat the operations of these criminals, until some time after peace had been restored.

To meet and destroy these vampires of society it was often necessary to resort to measures of seeming wrong, that good results might be obtained. One of the most ingenious criminals that fell into the hands of the secret service division during my official career was one Thomas Brownie, the son of a man of wealth, occupying a fine residence on an aristocratic street in New York City.

Young Brownie was possessed of a handsome, refined face, slight figure, polished address and the self poise of a man thoroughly trained in the best circles. Reared under the tuition of a good and tender mother and supplied with every luxury by a kind and indulgent father, it seems quite unaccountable that he should choose to enter the society of criminals. On account of his expertness in dodging the officers of the law he gained the confidence of many of the leading counterfeiters and forgers of the country. When I first learned of him he was leading the life of a man of inexhaustible means. His extravagance in dress and living was in keeping with the man of millions. Through various sources of information it was discovered that he was handling counterfeit money in a wholesale way and that he was connected with what was then known as the Miner gang of "Coniackers."

He had for some time been cute enough to deal in the bogus stuff in a manner to baffle the skill of the government officers. On more than one occasion when the officers thought him to be almost in their grasp, he would manage to elude them and disappear from their sight. The time came when neither the subtle ingenuity of his plans nor the wealth and respectability of his family served to shield him from the hands of the officers. He was a difficult man to capture, but notwithstanding his remarkable skill and adroitness he met his match at last.

It was while at the height of his criminal glory and while he was daily strutting Broadway with the air of a man of unimpeachable character and inexhaustible wealth that evidence sufficient for his conviction had been gathered and brought to my office. I at once directed his arrest and plans were laid for his capture.

At about the same time he suddenly disappeared from his usual haunts and the officers were unable to discover his hiding place.

Whenever the officers sought him in a place where his presence had been reported they were always just a little too late. The man they were seeking had changed his location.

When next heard of he would be in some other part of the city. In the course of time he was spoken of among the detectives as a will-o-the-wisp, as he was forever flitting about.

Two secret service officers were detailed to keep a careful watch upon his father's aristocratic mansion. For weeks, night and day, this was kept up without success. The man we were in quest of never put in an appearance there. The only persons seen to go out and in were an elderly gentleman and a young woman of fine appearance, presumably his daughter. There were also two servants, neither bearing the slightest resemblance to young Brownie.

One of the detectives employed in watching the house was a prepossessing young Italian. I will name him Louis Merito. He was well educated and of fine address. Watchful and of a nervous, sanguine temperament, he was nearly always sure of being the lucky one when sent with others to make a capture.

Late one pleasant afternoon several days after the young Italian had taken a position near the Brownie mansion, an elegantly attired young lady was seen coming down the front steps of the house, carrying a traveling bag. She entered a carriage in waiting and it rolled away at a moderate pace. Merito followed on foot and was able to keep the carriage in view. When the young lady crossed the gang plank of the steamer "Providence," then plying between New

York and Fall River, Merito was close at her heels. She stepped up into the grand salon and after moving about for a few moments, beckoned to a nut-brown chambermaid. When the servant came near the young lady opened a pearl inlaid portemonaie, and taking from it a ten dollar bill, requested her to procure a stateroom and passage ticket to the city of Boston.

A few minutes afterwards the chambermaid returned and informed the young lady that the staterooms on the boat were all engaged.

The young lady seemed greatly disappointed and said it was a sorry predicament for her to be placed in; and if the deep drawn sigh she uttered was an index of her feelings at that moment, she was not only greatly disappointed, but at a loss to know what to do.

Merito, who was near at hand, was

even than the diamond solitaires that adorned her ears.

The detective's heart was throbbing wildly. He could scarcely contain himself. It was a case of love at first sight. The hot blood of the Italian was surging to his head. He was quite bewildered.

Collecting his scattered senses he was soon able to convince the young woman that he was a man of consequence, and that while their meeting was but casual, he was greatly delighted because of the opportunity offered to make her acquaintance.

It was late in the evening when they bade each other good night with a promise to meet again on the arrival of the steamer at Fall River in the early morning.

Merito had not only discovered that Miss Brownie was lovely and fascinating, but that she was frank, confiding and truthful. She had nothing

home and fled to Canada, where she was expecting to meet him.

Learning this, the detective was deeply interested, not only in the brother, but in the sister as well. Indeed, she was the most attractive person he had ever before met. To his mind she was everything that a woman should be. Wealthy, educated and affectionate, she was brave and romantic enough to venture out alone and battle the cold world for the purpose of redeeming her wayward brother. So gentle and unassuming did she appear that he was sure she had a heart overflowing with love.

As these thoughts came meandering through his brain he saw in his eagerness the opportunity of his life. He would somehow be instrumental in saving the brother and thus win the fair girl's gratitude—perhaps her love. He felt sure that he could trust to her generous heart to forgive him for deceiving her by palming himself off as the son of a nobleman.

When the couple arrived in Boston they went at once to the United States hotel, where they took breakfast together. The detective now thought Miss Brownie more fascinating than ever and at the first opportunity he drew discretion to the winds and began wooing in the most approved Italian style. Pressing his suit with an ardor more impetuous than conventional, he begged her to become his wife.

It appears that her deep sorrow, her soft words, and above all, her tears, had quite bewildered him. Real beauty in distress was too much for the warm-blooded Latin, and he sur-

rendered unconditionally. In impassioned terms he declared his love and offered her his heart and hand.

The young woman, although seemingly overcome, was altogether too modest to accept. Somewhat taken back by this premature declaration, she was sufficiently self-poised to assure him that he was pleasing to her and that she deeply appreciated his attention. But she could not take any decisive step in so important a matter without first consulting her father. She felt that it was her first duty to save her brother. To accomplish this she was ready to sacrifice life itself.

Merito, never at a loss for a subterfuge, proposed to interest himself and secure a condemnation of her brother's offense through the assistance of the Italian consul at New York. This ray of light was presented in fine Italian style and must have sounded hopeful to the ears of Miss Brownie. Her face now fairly beamed with joy as she assured him she would willingly give all she possessed in the world to effect such a result. She promised to marry him should he succeed in saving her brother from prosecution for his past offenses.

The day following this I received at my New York office a letter marked "personal," which read as follows:

"United States Hotel, Boston, Mass. My Dear Chief:

"I write to inform you that I arrived here this morning in company with the sister of Brownie. Through cunning I made her acquaintance and learned everything. She is on the way to meet her brother Thomas. She tells me that he intends to remain outside

of the United States unless a compromise can be effected. She says he has offered to furnish information and will assist to break up the Miner gang of counterfeiters. If you will send me special authority and a guarantee that he will not be arrested I will go with his sister and coax him to come to New York. Please forward the papers to me here at once.

"Yours respectfully,  
"LOUIS MERITO."

The case was an important one and required my personal attention. If a compromise could be made that would result in the conviction of such men as Miner, I was anxious to make it. I chose to superintend it myself, and the next train that left for Boston took me with it. When I arrived there on the following morning I went directly to the United States hotel, where I met a thoroughly astonished Italian. He was much surprised at my unexpected appearance.

I soon learned enough to place me in possession of the facts in the case so far as the detective was concerned. I then demanded a personal interview with Miss Brownie, which was soon arranged. After introducing me to the lady, Merito retired from the room, as had been previously agreed upon. I found myself in the presence of a tall and stately young woman, tastefully and fashionably dressed. She held in her hand a large fan which she wielded with consummate grace. I found her fully posted on the nature of my business. Inviting me to be seated, she began the conversation and explained to me her proposed trip to Montreal, where she hoped to meet her brother, Thomas Brownie.

She had learned through a friend that her brother was anxious to quit counterfeiting and that he could, if given an opportunity, put the government officers in a position to arrest a number of leading counterfeiters. She did not know the particulars, but was sure that her brother would, if permitted to return to New York, render the government important service. She said that her father had nearly lost his mind on account of the action of his son and that he was ready to undergo almost any sacrifice and pay any reasonable sum of money for the purpose of saving his boy.

What she said was quite reasonable, and after questioning her for some time I had about come to the conclusion that her offer, if carried out as promised, would be a good thing for the government.

There were a number of counterfeiters then on the market and I was exceedingly anxious to break up the gang by arresting its leaders and securing the plates. The Miner gang had first and last cost the government a considerable sum of money. While talking over the details of the proposed surrender I stepped to a window and raised the shade, upon which the sun suddenly shone forth, lighting up the room and casting its bright rays fully upon the face of the lady before me. Drawing my chair a little nearer and more in front of her I was enabled to look her straight in the face. My eyes resting on hers seemed to disconcert her. She blinked and turned her head. I straightened up a little and stared at her. She started to rise.

"Keep your seat," I commanded, in an authoritative tone.

At this moment I saw defiance mingled with terror in her eyes. At first I had noticed nothing in her appearance or actions to create suspicion. As was quite natural, she now seemed excited. This might have been attributed to a disturbed condition of her mind on account of the actions of her brother—a natural sequence under the circumstances. She again turned towards me and the sun shone upon her face. I at once detected the work of an artist skilled in the use of shades of paint. I noticed, too, that her hair had not the glossy appearance of natural growth. I was quite sure she was in disguise.

"Before this business goes any further," I said, "I want you to remove your false hair and wipe the paint and powder from your face."

As I arose in front of her she started up with an indignant glare and attempted to push me away. In a flash I reached for her chin. Giving it a quick jerk, my fastenings gave way and it rolled on the carpet. There was no longer any use for concealment. Thomas Brownie stood before me. The game was up. There was no more room for dodging. He began peeling off layer after layer of his feminine apparel. When he had fully disengaged himself from his dressmaker's outfit he opened his traveling bag and proceeded to clothe himself in masculine attire.

Merito, who had during this interview remained in the hall, was now requested to come into the room. I handed him a pair of handkerchiefs and Brownie immediately put up his hands to receive them. He was completely done for and offered no further resistance.

In taking the trip on the steamer "Providence" and playing the part of a fascinating woman, it was not surprising that Brownie was able to dupe the detective. As a gifted impersonator he could reproduce to a nicety the tones and modulations of the detective's voice. His description and imitation of the impassioned love scene that took place between himself and Merito was very entertaining. Brownie was too crafty and gifted a criminal to run at large. He was put on trial, convicted and sentenced to the Albany penitentiary for a term of fifteen years.

Merito was so chagrined and overcome on account of his escapade with Brownie that he lost his assurance and was unable to face his fellow officers. The last I heard of him he was on the Pacific coast.



as kind hearted as he was enterprising, and upon the impulse of the moment he pushed himself to the front and with the politest of French bows, said: "Please excuse me, young lady, I am very much pained to witness your distress, and I should be glad to assist you. If you will allow me I think I can procure you a stateroom."

In modest tones she thanked him for his kindness and confidently offered him the ten dollar bill that had been returned to her by the chambermaid.

"Never mind the money until I know what I can do for you."

He thereupon went below. The sister, he thought, is not responsible for the sins of her brother; besides, the making of her acquaintance might give him a better opportunity for discovering the whereabouts of the man he was seeking. In his imagination he was sure that she was going to meet him.

This was his opportunity, thought he. He would ingratiate himself into the good graces of this young woman and if possible learn the whereabouts of her brother.

The oily-tongued detective had no great difficulty in securing the coveted prize. Steamboat clerks are always wise enough to reserve an extra ticket or two for special purposes.

When Merito returned to the grand salon and handed the young lady her tickets she was profuse in her thanks and expressed her deep obligation. As she held the tickets between her jeweled fingers she beamed a smile and displayed a set of pearly white teeth, encircled by a pair of ruby lips, and oh, such eyes! More sparkling

to conceal. He had learned everything. She was a young and sensitive maiden who had courageously ventured from her father's home with the purpose of meeting a much loved but wayward brother. How, then, could he help sympathizing with her? Even though his representations in regard to himself were falsely made for the purpose of obtaining her confidence, he believed he was sufficiently shrewd to square himself with her at the proper time.

As deception is oftentimes a part of the detective's stock in trade, he thought there could be no great harm in it after all was understood. It seems that he told her the secret of his being the son of an Italian nobleman of great wealth and that he was traveling incog to gratify his curiosity.

While the story he told was wholly false, he was quite good looking enough and sufficiently genteel in appearance to bear out the statement. From what occurred it was apparent that the young woman herself was somewhat impressed and quite uncertain as to the true status of the detective.

Her story as told to Merito appeared straightforward and truthful. Her mother was dead. Her father, although in the enjoyment of a large income, the result of frugality and well-applied business transactions, was bowed down with grief and very much broken in health because of the wayward course of her darling brother. He had been led astray by evil associates and was being pursued by the government officers, who charged him with dealing in counterfeit money. To evade arrest he had forsaken his

rendered unconditionally. In impassioned terms he declared his love and offered her his heart and hand.

The young woman, although seemingly overcome, was altogether too modest to accept. Somewhat taken back by this premature declaration, she was sufficiently self-poised to assure him that he was pleasing to her and that she deeply appreciated his attention. But she could not take any decisive step in so important a matter without first consulting her father. She felt that it was her first duty to save her brother. To accomplish this she was ready to sacrifice life itself.

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