

# The Shoemaker's Daughter Who Fooled Broadway

**How Poor But Ingenious Little Maria Desmonini, Tired of Working Ten Hours a Day in a Sweatshop, Invaded "the Wisest Street in the World," and Made It Wine and Dine and Court Her for Weeks**

**Just By "Talking Money."**

**B**ROADWAY, the wise, has been fooled by an East Side girl, the daughter of a poor shoemaker. The Great White Way, that boasts that it can never be taken in, has been held up to ridicule by a nineteen-year-old sweatshop worker.

The highway of amusement, known throughout this country and across the seas as "the wise guy of streets," has been duped, outwitted, laughed to scorn by a product of the tenement districts.

Maria Desmonini, whose father's shoemaking shop is in a basement of one of the fire escape-draped dwelling places of the many at No. 510 East Fourteenth street, has been feasted and toasted, and been, though for a brief time, a belle of Broadway.

The "wise ones" of the "wise street" are wondering how it ever happened. Maria Desmonini, albeit in the Tombs, laughs. She thinks Broadway is as gullible as any other part of Manhattan. More gullible, indeed, than her own earnest-eyed East Side.

"I got tired working ten hours a day and giving all the money to my mother. So I ran away and made them believe I was a rich woman, the owner of a coffee plantation in Brazil. And they believed it for two months, the fools," she says, and laughs.

A pretty girl, with deep-set, shrewd black eyes, a little too close together, an engaging smile and enviable fluency of speech, is Maria Desmonini. She is tall, with an ability to "wear her clothes well." She has a lithe, swinging grace, an exotic earnestness of manner, a wealth of gesture. As Ruth Downes, the name she gave herself, she was "something new." In its never ending quest of a novelty Broadway discovered her.

For two months she lived at fine hotels or exclusive boarding houses. She had the best rooms and the best places at table. Every one who met her was charmed by her. Her stories of life in Brazil were vastly interesting—to those who had never visited the South American country. Her romance was so sad and so greatly to her credit. She told it so well, with alternate sighs and smiles, the tale of how her proud, tyrannical mother had tried to marry her to a California multimillionaire whom the daughter did not love, and how her pure, proud soul, revolting at such slavery, she had taken a drawing room palace car and crossed the continent in the fastest train that runs between San Francisco and New York.

"Mamma, dear foolish woman, is so proud. She would not let me marry a mere millionaire. There are several of them whom I might have loved. He must have many millions. Dear mamma, I know she is weeping her eyes out. She is such a picture—always wears rustling black silks and a high gold comb blazing with jewels, and a priceless lace mantilla. A handsome woman, but so proud of her blue blood and our great fortune."

**The Cross-Continental Journey Really a Ride Cross-Town**

When Maria's mother, the East Side shoemaker's wife, made her appearance in court she wore a shawl over her head. Ruefully the witnesses who had been listening to Maria's stories gazed upon that threadbare gray shawl. When the cross-continental journey resolved itself into a ride on a Fourteenth street crosstown car, with a transfer up Madison avenue, the wise men and women of Broadway could have wept in sheer chagrin.

"But she knew Spanish," they protested. So she did. She learned it from a little red pocket dictionary she always carried. The dictionary cost fifteen cents. "Spanish is easy if you know Italian. It is so like it," explained Maria, with her mischievous laugh.

"I have plenty of money. I work for occupation, not for mere salary," said Maria when she visited the offices of theatrical managers. One after another engaged her to pose as a haughty beauty. "She will be stunning in the pictures—at last we have found a rival of Anita Stewart," said the screen magnates to their office staffs.

The producer of a musical comedy engaged her for a production. She was to play the part of a Brazilian beauty, and in a yellow satin frock, and with many diamonds, was to dance the tango as it is danced on its native soil, the pampas of Argentina.

Then came the news that bowed over Broadway, that left gasping the street that is proud of its self-possession—that boasts that it can never be surprised—"Ruth Downes," she of the swinging, Spanish walk, of the stories of romance that held a mingled flavor of the old and new, was arrested! A commonplace officer came to her lodgings, broke in upon a tale of an all-night ball at the hacienda of a billionaire cousin of hers in Argentina, a billionaire who aspired for her hand, but whom she repulsed because she loved him not. The rude, ordinary policeman answered her rictused "Come in," and laying a hand upon her graceful olive shoulder, said, "Come on!"

"What for?" Ruth Downes towered above him as an offended queen, resenting the affront of a barbarian.

"It's an emissary of your mother's come to take you home," suggested a fellow boarder.

"Not on your life! I'm pinching her because I want them clothes and jewelry she took from the woman at No. 248 West Forty-fourth street," said the rude, common detective.

**"She Was That Queenlike She Had Me Going," Said the Detective.**

"I'll have you dismissed from the force, you dreadful person! Take your fingers off my gown. Your very touch will soil it!" The detective afterward said, "She was that queenlike she had me going. I almost begged her pardon and said there must be some mistake."

He might as well have done so, for when she was taken into court she denied so indignantly the theft that the magistrate discharged her. Miss "Downes," her eyes flashing, left the courtroom, moved from the boarding house where she had been subjected to such unwarrantable affront and resumed her reign as the novelty of Broadway.

She was seen in the smart Broadway restaurants, in the company of admiring new friends, some of them actors, some managers, some "angels" of amusement enterprises. Always they treated her with the utmost respect. Always they were enchanted by her stories of life on a Brazilian coffee plantation and of the journeyings of rich planters and their families to San Francisco and to Paris. True, she made some remarkable statements about those cities, but her admiring and trustful audiences always ascribed these singularities to her lack of knowledge of the English language. They merely smiled at her fascinating broken speech, always accompanied by her dazzling smile.

Then again an interruption. Once more was Ruth Downes arrested. This because a dress suit case containing some of the articles of clothing she was said to have stolen was found in her room.

"Some one placed it there while I was out. I never saw it before," she said, her utter disdain of "those common people" who brought the charge shown in her air and speech and her scornful black eyes.

Maria Desmonini As She Appeared While Masquerading As "Miss Ruth Downes of Brazil Persecuted by a Tyrannical Mother."



**Gorgeous Dresses Hid, Metaphorically, of Course, the Patched Skirt of the Sweatshop Worker as That Her Feet Were Still from Habit Treading a Phantom Sewing Machine.**

"I am the victim of a conspiracy, Your Honor," she said. "This Miss Mary Wilson, who makes these charges, hates me because I am what I am and she is what she is."

The court released her on \$1,500 bail. "A lawyer who was there trying another case and who heard my story and believed me signed for my bail," is Maria Desmonini's explanation of her second escape from a prison cell.

Back to the brilliance of the Great White Way, back to friends, indignant, sympathetic, went the harassed Brazilian beauty. To avoid the drain upon her time made by her popularity she moved to lodgings on Upper Broadway near Hudson River. Finding the quiet irksome, she chose new and exclusive quarters near Washington Square. There it was the meddlesome law once more overtook her.

"We want you, Maria Desmonini, for stealing three hundred dollars' worth of clothing from Miss Margaret Tevis at the Hotel Martha Washington," said the law in the person of an officer.

This time the judge was obdurate. Tears, rage, stories of splendor and influence moved him not. The baffled beauty fainted in the Fifty-seventh street court. At this time she is awaiting in the Tombs trial for theft.

To the Tombs came no Broadway satellites of the "Brazilian beauty." A faithful bevy of seven paid her a visit. Came a shoemaker, bent shouldered and pale from drudgery, her father; the worn mother, with the gray shawl; a sister, a cloak finisher, who walked with a crutch; a hunchback brother, a troop of younger ones, the youngest a baby a year and a half old. All sobbed and cried, "Maria! Maria!"

The "Brazilian beauty," flinging off her air of disguise, fervently embraced them.

"My sister was a good girl. She worked hard at cloak linings for seven years. She and my mother worked together in the cloak shops," said the crippled sister. "She was so kind. If she met a hungry woman in the street she brought her home and fed her. If the woman had no home Maria would bring her home to sleep. She was engaged to a young man, a salesman in a Sixth avenue store. She was in love with him and wanted to get married. She and my mother quarrelled about whether she should get married. On February 28 she and my mother quarrelled and she went away. We thought she was at my aunt's in Brooklyn. We never knew what had happened until we read it in the papers." The sister wept.

Maria laughed. "Anyway I fooled wise old Broadway for six weeks. Takes a wise person to do that, doesn't it?"

"I got tired working hard and giving all my money to my mother. I had been working hard for seven years and getting nothing but my keep out of it. I wanted pretty clothes and I wanted to see life. I told mother I thought I could make more money by posing

for moving pictures, and she scolded. I went out, as they thought, for a walk, but I took a crosstown car and transferred up Madison avenue and went to the Martha Washington Hotel. I stayed there one night. Then I went around to the moving picture studios. I told them I was from Brazil. I spoke Spanish to them—none of them could speak it—and they seemed impressed. They all told me to come back. Some of them paid me money down, because I told them I was wanted at all the studios and didn't know whether I could come back. The more I said that I was rich and only wanted to pose for fun, the more anxious they were to pay me a retainer. I moved out of the Martha Washington to another hotel—the Dresden, on Forty-fourth street. I went to one fine hotel when I was out of money and told them I was from Brazil and had run away from my rich parents in California, but expected money soon, and they believed me and let me run up a bill. In the studios and the managers' offices I met well-known people whose names inspire respect. They swallowed my story whole.

"Generally I got my money without going back to the studios. I posed for several pictures. I don't remember their names. But I made a specialty of telling my story and getting the money down, leaving my address and never going back. They were all glad to have a rich girl posing for them. They said it gave 'class' to their studios. One man told me I had a 'swell carriage.' I told him I hadn't any automobile, but I expected to have one, and he laughed. He said, 'Sure you will. Ain't you the Queen of the Movies?' That name travelled. Soon they began to salute me as 'Your Majesty.' Oh, it was fun.

"I liked the restaurants. The fellows I met at the studios used to take me out to dinner and to supper. Honest, they seemed proud to take me into those swell places on their arms. If they'd known who I was they wouldn't have looked at me. The biggest snobs on earth have Broadway addresses. It's easy to fool them off their heads just as a title does Fifth avenue. I'm glad I fooled them. Any one can who is smart. They're not the wise ones they think they are. I could take a new name, or a new story, and do the same thing over again.

"I don't know anything about those clothes and the jewelry they said I took. I never saw Miss Margaret Tevis, of the Hotel Martha Washington. As for Miss Mary Wilson, I don't know anything about her lost dresses. Some one put that dress suit case in my room as a 'plant.'

"There's one thing I'm sorry about. I used to be a city missionary. I gave the people on the East Side lots of good advice when I visited them. I hope they won't read the papers. And I was a Sunday school teacher until I began teaching Broadway. I hope the little girls in my class won't hear where their teacher is."

Maria Desmonini, alias Ruth Downes, laughed.

**Why Your Best Brain Work Is Done When You're Ill**

By PHILIP OSTERMAN, M.D.  
If you want to do your very best brain work don't keep yourself too fit. But remember, too, that the longer you work when you are really ill the greater will be the breakdown which must follow. It is generally considered that a man who is physically fit necessarily does better brain work than a man who is slightly out of color. This is by no means the case, for under certain circumstances a man who is not physically fit is capable of better work than a man in the best of

health. Of course, I am not referring to cases of serious illness, but to cases when a man is "sleazy" out of sorts or possibly sickening for some illness. Let us suppose that a man is slightly feverish. Now, fever invariably hastens all the processes of the human body. For example, it produces an increased flow of ideas. In the case of a novelist or a man whose work requires wild imagination such a state of mind would naturally be valuable up to a point. But an increase of fever beyond

that point does not imply an increase of ideas—at least coherent ideas. It is this vast profusion of ideas due to increasing fever that finally produces delirium. But the chief cause of a man doing better work when he is ill is the increased will power he summons up on such occasions. When a man is exceedingly fit he thinks everything else in the world is all right. He feels that everything is going on as excellently. He does not do quite his best. He tries only three-quarter as hard as he can.