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★ Counterfeit Love

Crystal Caudill
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Former fiancées weigh the cost of reuniting with each other in Crystal Caudill's invigorating *Counterfeit Love*, a Gilded Age novel set in Cincinnati's underworld.

Broderick, a Secret Service agent, infiltrates a counterfeit ring that's on the cusp of circulating fifty-dollar notes. Meanwhile, Theresa is loyal to her indebted, disciplinarian grandfather, Colonel Plane. When her efforts to ward off his creditors place her at a graveyard meeting, Broderick suspects that she's part of the ring, too. His desire to protect her from a fellow agent who's pursuing the case wars against his need to uphold the truth.

This original dilemma leads to an adventure in which cleverly placed red flags generate suspense, including around Theresa's artistic skills and Colonel Plane's role in it all. Hints about the cause of Broderick and Theresa's broken engagement—and her subsequent engagement to another suitor, for whom she feels no passion—raise doubts about the pair's ability to regain trust in each other, let alone renew their romance. These high-stakes tensions are fascinating, as is the fact that the couple's faith enables them an opening to reconnect, despite their self-denial.

Broderick is observant as he moves through Cincinnati's back streets; Theresa is valiant and vulnerable, though her attempts to shoulder her grandfather's burdens suggest that she's also stubborn. She believes that God will provide, and trusts in this more than depending on specific outcomes. As violence escalates around both leads, their interactions with each other stay tender. The story culminates with a sense of justice.

There are trials, misunderstandings, heartening conversations, and acts of derring-do in the historical romance novel *Counterfeit Love*, in which a bold criminal plot leads to deeper notions of perseverance.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2022)

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