

The BROKEN COIN

By EMERSON HOUGH

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FIRST INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER I.

The Cryptic Coin.
Kitty Gray, crack reporter on the Evening Star, pulled out of her typewriter the last sheet of paper and piled it on the little heap of finished copy which lay at her right. Then she closed her desk, stepped to the wardrobe and took her coat and hat.

Taking her little collection of copy papers from the desk, with the privilege of long tenure in office she walked to the desk of the city editor, who, although himself a married man, had all this time without success tried to look at the work before him and not at the trim figure of Kitty Gray making ready for her luncheon journey.

"When will you deign to return?" asked he with a certain lapse in journalistic dignity.

"When I have a better story than this guff—in the vernacular."
Kitty's favorite luncheon place was in one of the great department stores, where women were made welcome and comfortable, and she bent thither her steps; but midway in her journey she paused, as often she did, to gaze into the window of the little antique shop which occupied space in one of the unimportant side streets.

Kitty Gray's eyes were arrested by something that she saw—an object which she did not recall ever before to have noted in the window. It lay close to the glass, just tilted back so that it might be the better seen. It apparently was an old coin or part of one, curiously done in some dark metal, probably silver badly oxidized.

As Kitty bent down to examine it more closely, she saw that the coin bore an inscription, or what appeared to be such—an inscription broken across by the fracture which had divided the coin itself.

Her curiosity excited, Kitty Gray stepped into the little shop, whose proprietor she knew very well.

"Good morning, Mr. Mainz," she said with the customary newspaper inversion of the order of the day, "how's business? Any new fans, idols, coins—?"

"Coins? Vot? Sure, I got something new dot is out. I choost t'ink of him. He iss only a part of himself. Should I show him to you?"

"Oh, maybe I saw it in the window," said Kitty, smiling. "You mean the broken coin?"

"Sure. Vait till I got him."
She took up the coin now from the case, and some strange sort of thrill came over her as she did so, she could not tell why. What was its message, halting, broken, incomplete? Did it hold a story? What was the story?

"It's odd, isn't it?" said she, and laid it down again carelessly—with a carelessness well forgiven, for Kitty Gray had bought antiques before now, and knew well enough when to suppress interest.

"Odt? I should say it vas odt," rejoined the old dealer. Kitty had picked up an initial mother of pearl fan and was studiously examining that now.

"How much?" asked she, holding up the fan.

"For the broken coin?"
"No, the fan."
"I want twelf tollar for him."
"For the coin?"
"No, for the fan. For the coin—vat you gif me?"

"Why, what earthly use would I have for a broken piece of metal like that, Mr. Mainz?"

"Gif me for the fan eleven dollar, and I make you a present of the broken coin anyway."
Kitty Gray's heart gave a sudden little jump. She would have given twice eleven dollars for the coin itself, but she made a good pretense.

"Eleven dollars is a good deal of money," said she. "I would have to go without lunch for quite a while."
"You are a goot sport, Miss Gray," said the old dealer. "I dank you very mooch. I should wrap them up?"

"I'm down to the last words now. It is curious—a proper name. It is only the Latin name of the kingdom of Gretzhoffen! That's a little bankrupt kingdom over in southern Europe, near the Mediterranean. I know about it—I did a story about it once, the time the kingdom was trying to float a loan in this country. I had to read up a whole lot."

"I bet you could did it, Miss Gray," said Mainz, admiringly. "Vell, goot-by. Come again and tell me vot you find out, like a goot girl."

"Sure," said Kitty, and turned to leave, her coin clutched tightly in her hand. So intent was she on her purchase that she did not notice she had dropped the package containing the shell-ribbed fan. Vaguely missing something as she emerged into the open air, she turned back, and almost ran into a man who had passed her as she came out. He was a foreign-looking individual, dark of hair and eyes and skin, strongly built, a figure such as one would note. He bowed now courteously enough as he handed her the package she had let fall. Kitty thanked him and hurried on her way.

This stranger entered the shop and spoke in some foreign tongue to the old dealer, who shook his head.

"No," said he, answering in English. "I choost sold it—to dot young lady who vent out."

"Who is she? I know her very well. She is on der papers. Better look out or she put you in der paper sure. Miss Kitty Gray vos an oldt vrent of mine. She read like a book vot vos on the coin. Vy didn't you telephone—maybe she sell it back to you—I don't know. She wouldn't sold it back to me, I know dot. Vot! you are going?"

CHAPTER II.

The Big Assignment.
Kitty Gray did not go to her usual place for luncheon that day. Instead she hurried into a nearby delicatessen shop and bought a sandwich, which she put in her handbag. After this she hurried on back to the office. Arrived there, without ceremony she went again to the desk of the city editor, and silently laid down before him her empty purse, her antique fan, her sandwich and her broken coin.

Cutler looked up with professional calm.

"Yes, Miss Gray? Why all this orderly array of fresh and interesting objects?"

"That is my story," said she. "What makes you think so? Are you seeing things, Miss Gray?"

"Look here."
Kitty picked up the coin and showed it to him.

"See, it is broken quite across—more than a third of it gone. The inscription is Latin. It is not so much what is on the coin—it is what is off of it. Perhaps it commemorates something."

"Commemorates what, Miss Gray?"
"Precisely—what? That's the story!"
"By Jove!" Cutler was studying at the inscription. "Sub means 'under'—what does it say?—under the bamboo tree?"

"No, 'under the sidewalk' or the 'flagstones,' or 'floor.'"
"Underneath the flagstone or 'pavement' or 'floor'—in the angle or 'corner'—whatever that may be—'chamber of torture'—'room of torments'—whatever it is—there will be found treasures—of the king—of—"

"—Of Gretzhoffen!" concluded Kitty Gray. "You have not forgotten all your Latin, have you, Mr. Cutler? There is a story for you—if we can only dig it out. There'd be an assignment, wouldn't there? I'd rather do that than society in the summer-time."

Billy Cutler, time-tried news man, grown thin and grim and gray in the business, sat for just one moment in thought. "Wait a minute, please," said he at length, and rose to leave the room.

Kitty did wait anxiously enough, for what reason she could not tell. She sat at her own desk, the mysterious broken coin tightly clutched in her hand. It seemed an hour before she saw the slender form of the city editor returning from the door which led to the office of the manager and publisher of the Evening Star. He looked at her thoughtfully as he approached. He held out a check.

"Three thousand dollars!" Kitty Gray's eyes grew larger.

"Expense money. Three months' vacation. Full powers as missionary plenipotentiary of the Evening Star to Gretzhoffen, ambassador to any old place you happen to think of, Miss Gray. I never knew the old man to go off his head before, but he has this time."

glances about the first little room, and then paused.
The rug in the hall was turned over at one corner—was it by accident? The pictures all hung on the walls, yet several were askew, and—the little wall-safe back of one of the pictures—which had held some small objects of little value, an old daguerreotype or two, some silver spoons, a few gold pieces which she had cherished—had been broken open. Its contents now lay upon the floor. Amazed, Kitty stooped and picked them up, one by one. Nothing was missing—even the gold coins were there. Nothing had been harmed. But who had done this, and why?

CHAPTER II.

En Voyage.

The great liner Anne of Austria lay in her slip at the dock, her giant pulses just throbbing now and then. Everywhere men and women were hurrying to and fro in the customary orderly confusion of the last few moments before the departure of an ocean steamer.

Calmly Kitty Gray passed on her way to the boat's office and asked for her mail and her keys.

As she turned, she almost stumbled against a man who had just hurried aboard—a dark man, thickset, foreign in appearance. She had the strange conviction that she had seen him before.

Then she turned to settle herself down in her quarters. So far as she knew, she had not an acquaintance on the boat.

Now, oddly enough, she recalled the face of the stranger, the dark-visaged foreigner whom she had met at the ship's office. Surely it must have been the same man who had handed her her package when she dropped it in the little antique shop! Why should he be on board this boat? Why should he recognize her, remember her—for he had? Trust a woman to know that—she had—he did. Yes, he had known her. Again a cold feeling of apprehension clutched at Kitty Gray's stout little heart.

She rose and tried to fling off her depression by means of a visit to the dining saloon. But for some reason she felt she would be more comfortable—or safe—in her own room. Here she lay down upon the single berth, which was directly beneath the porthole.

She woke—she knew not when nor why—woke with her eyes staring, passing in her instant from sleep to waking.

A face was looking in upon her! A man had been looking at her, or trying to look at her, as she lay asleep.

Kitty Gray's instinct spoke to her some message—she could not tell what. Swiftly she caught the chamolais bag from her bosom, and, emptying its main treasures into her hand, placed them in that other treasure house of woman—her stocking. Again feeling the drowsiness invoked by the fresh salt air, at length she lay down once more upon the little couch and resigned herself more comfortably to slumber.

But again she woke—this time it was with a scream of terror. She had felt the touch of a hand. Something had tugged at her neck.

She raised her hand. The chamolais bag was gone—it was the jerk of the broken silk cord that had



"I Choost Sold It to Dot Young Lady Who Went Out."

awakened her! And there was the hand that had done it, a strong, dark hand, full-veined, hairy. It still clutched the bag—it still was visible at the porthole. A ribbon end had entangled itself for just an instant in the porthole fastening—an instant long enough for Kitty to see what had been the hand that had committed this robbery.

But who was the robber himself? Quick as thought Kitty sprang to the door, ran down the deck, out the next deck door. The band was giving its first saloon concert, and the decks were sparsely tenanted, it seemed. Far off towards the bow a man was passing—what man she could not say. He seemed neither to hurry nor to linger. She could not make out who it was, dared not hang upon him her own suspicion.

She turned to the captain now and made report of what had happened not once but twice; but even as she went she smiled grimly to herself. The



"It's Odd, Isn't It?" She Said.

chamolais bag was worthless—it had held only a kerchief, a bit of powder puff, perhaps a little silver—nothing more. Her real treasures—she knew where they were now.

The captain was outraged at what he learned when at length she gained admittance to his cabin. With marine precision, he acted at once. From that time on all through the voyage, a boat detective stood at each end of the passageway which led to Kitty's stateroom.

No trace of any other robbery could be found, nor any clue by which the intruder could be identified.

CHAPTER IV.

The Consul's Story.

The business of any true American consul is to have known the father, or at least some relation, of any caller who comes from his own nation. Consul Jethro Thompson of Ohio, cast away in the melancholy enterprise of representing the dignity of this republic in this small and none-too-well-known principality of Gretzhoffen, was glad—really glad—to see Miss Kitty Gray. And he knew—really knew—her father, or had done so at the time when he was still living.

"It's a grand little place, isn't it—Gretzhoffen?" said Kitty smiling. "I've read about it—and written about it—before now. But this isn't a vacation, really. I am on a big assignment, Mr. Consul. I may want your help—the only trouble is, I don't know what I do want to do—I am after a story, and I don't know where it is or what it is!"

The gaunt, kindly old man smiled at her. "Well, my dear, rest assured that I will do all I can for you. And, between us, we ought to start something, maybe; if it's stories you're after, you've come to the place where they grow, that's sure enough. Why, Miss Kitty, the story of the king of Gretzhoffen alone would fill a book."

"What do you know of Gretzhoffen, anyhow?" he asked suddenly. "You said you had written about it. I suppose—"

"Well, you see," replied Kitty, "when the big news story about the proposed Gretzhoffen loan—its hawking about the street and its rejection—when that came out I was put on the assignment of looking into Gretzhoffen in general. I remember that the old king's name was Michael, wasn't it?"

"The one that died? Yes, Michael the First. He was a good sort. His death was the unluckiest thing that ever happened for this poor little people. He was a good man, King Michael, and a strong one and a just. So much cannot be said, I am thinking, of the new incumbent of the throne, Michael the Second."

"You see, this Michael the Second is only a king in name, when it comes to facts. He is only a little lieutenant. He has been put on the job by a bigger and stronger man—Count Frederick is the real power behind the throne in Gretzhoffen—a strong and handsome man—be sure you don't fall in love with him. What Count Frederick plans no one knows. Perhaps he has his own eye on the throne—we can't tell what may happen. I say it is a tense sort of place, Gretzhoffen. But Gretzhoffen is broke, Michael, the king, is broke. Count Frederick, the Warwick of Gretzhoffen, also is broke. That is why they tried to make a loan in our own country."

"But they didn't seem to have the collateral—no unused revenues—nothing which had not been used or spent or wasted."

"When Michael the First died, his treasury disappeared. He was rich, the old king was—rich in the name of Gretzhoffen. But the crown jewels, the imperial securities, the crown treasures of all sorts, the imperial mintage of every description—they disappeared. There was rumor that the old king hid his treasures somewhere, but that he left some sort of a mysterious record by which they might be traced. No one knows just what was left for that record. It is known, however, or supposed, at least, that it was put into the possession of an old servant—one of the few men the old king trusted. But this man finally gave up some part of what he knew—part of the proof, whatever it was—to the new king, when he himself was about to die."

"Between them, Count Frederick and Michael the Second bankrupted this kingdom, or at least Michael did. It

was their oyster, and they opened it and scraped the shell.

"Now, in case the Count Frederick, the big plunger, or his man Grahame, or the little King Michael the Second, should ever get hold of the remaining clue to the whereabouts of old King Michael's treasury—pouf!—you know what would happen then. There would, Miss Kitty, to quote a certain American ballad, 'be a hot time in the old town' in that case."

"It's a story!" said Kitty Gray, drawing a long breath. But a troubled light came to her eyes at the same time. "How will a fellow dig it out?" she asked whimsically.

CHAPTER V.

The Encounter.

Meanwhile, during the interview Kitty Gray had with the American consul, a scene of other import was enacting elsewhere in the Gretzhoffen capital. In the interior of a white marble fronted palace, perhaps a mile or so distant from the humble quarters of the American consulate, a tall, dark, imperious man was pacing up and down restlessly, his eyes now and again turned upon the door of the great apartment, as though he expected someone to enter. At length the door did open. A soft-footed servant appeared.

"Monsieur Roleau, excellency," he announced.

"What, Roleau!" exclaimed the tall man impetuously, as the visitor entered. "What has kept you? The ship docked hours ago. And have you got it? Come, come, man!"

The individual addressed as Roleau bowed deeply. "Excellency," he said, "I came as soon as I could be sure I would not be watched."

He was a man of dark complexion, of strong and sturdy build, of broad shoulders and deep chest—a man half a giant, one would have said—but his eyes dropped as they met the stern gaze of him he addressed, as though he might have been his master.

"You found it—you succeeded, then—tell me!"

"Excellency—sure—yes."
The newcomer extended a hand which trembled slightly. "I swear it was in this bag"—he was offering a little chamolais bag tied with a ribbon at the top—a bag which apparently had been once suspended by the broken silk cord attached to it.

"You say it was in this bag—then why not now?"

The tall man caught the little receptacle from the other's hands—ripped it wide—shook out the contents. There fell into his hand upon the table near which he stood, only a few trinkets of a woman's toilet—a little dainty handkerchief—a coin, yes, a coin.

The tall man held this up in his hand, his face distorted with rage.

"What! a half-dollar of their cursed money! Curse you!" He half shrieked, and as he did so flung the piece full in the other's face, with such violence that the skin broke under its impact.

"The coin!" went on the enraged speaker—"what do you mean? Do you mock me, Frederick, your real monarch? You shall die for this. You have failed—you have not found it—you have lost it!"

His own eyes half starting from his head in his anger, he strode forward and caught the throat of Roleau in his two mighty hands, shaking him as he would have shaken a child.

"Go!" he said, and flung him toward the door.

him into the door of her own vehicle and followed him.

"The Ritz, driver," she directed. And so, in the role of Samaritan, Kitty Gray made her second arrival that day at the stately hotel which she had selected as her own abode.

All through the ride the man at her side remained silent, suffering acutely. He turned his face away. Again there came to Kitty Gray the strange feeling that she felt something which she ought to recognize, she could not tell what. In truth, sympathy had the better of curiosity for the time. She did not examine her strange companion closely, only speaking to him an occasional word of sympathy and assurance. Suddenly remembering that she did not know who he was, and remembering also that her own conduct might be held as singular, she turned her companion over to the head porter of the hotel and hurried away to her own room.

Apparently the disguised stranger remained at the hotel that night, for when, at eleven of the following morning, Kitty Gray emerged, properly arrayed for a morning ride, she saw the stranger in the hotel lobby, his face swathed in bandages. He seemed to be waiting for her approach, spoke to her some words in a tongue which she did not understand—then changed to French—and then to English.

"If mademoiselle would permit me," he said, "I might be of use, even as I am. I know the city. Might I act as courier for the time? I would show my gratitude, if mademoiselle regards it as proper for me thus to do so."

Kitty Gray, actuated by no definite purpose, but governed by the impulse which she trusted in her trade, turned suddenly toward the curb where stood her hired motor car, and motioned to the man to enter.

They passed on down the wide avenue of the capital, a strange couple enough. Kitty looked curiously about her, studiously examining everything she saw. Yes, the old city was beautiful, with its long lines of green trees, its stately edifices built by hands long stilled in death. Soon she began to find the need of a guide, and unobtrusively the muffled figure at her side quietly suggested the information he thought might be of service. He pointed out some of the other large hotels—mansion houses of this or that court official, the hall of justice, the city hall, the great cathedrals, the royal palace, the palace of the Count Frederick.

"Yes," exclaimed Kitty Gray, "it was here that I found you yesterday. The hotel of the Count Frederick. I know, yes, but why—how did you—"

Her companion suddenly raised a hand, touched her arm gently, requesting silence.

A great car, splendidly equipped and driven at rushing speed, came out of the very side street on which Kitty Gray had found her companion on the previous day. In the car, his gloved hand resting on his stick, sat a tall man, erect, strikingly handsome in his own way, imperious of air and bold of gaze.

Kitty Gray did not notice that her companion had shrunk back low into the seat. Her own eyes met those of the occupant of the advancing car.

Kitty Gray was young and more than a little handsome. She had taken pains to turn herself out well as she might in view of the possible surroundings she might meet on her



"You Shall Die for This."

strange quest. To the bold eyes of the tall stranger she must have seemed fair enough to look upon, for suddenly, as he passed, he stared at her directly, bowed, raised his hat—yes, even smiled.

"Who was that man?" demanded Kitty Gray fiercely of her companion. "He doesn't know me. And yet how like he looked to pictures I have seen. There was a man—an international spy, they said in our country—some strange foreigner—at the time of the Gretzhoffen loan fiasco. Yes, the two faces are strangely alike. Who is he?"

"Of the other I know nothing," rejoined her companion; "but this—he is the Count Frederick."

"Count Frederick—the pretender!" "Hush, mademoiselle, for God's sake hush! We do not dare—you must not dare."

"Follow!" said Kitty Gray sharply. "Now tell me more."
(TO BE CONTINUED.)