

The Broken Coin

By EMERSON HOUGH

From the Scenario by Grace Cunard

A Story of Mystery and Adventure

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Novelized From the Motion Picture Drama of the Same Name. Produced by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company.

SYNOPSIS.

Kitty Gray, newspaper woman, finds in a curio shop half of a broken coin, the mutilated inscription on which arouses her curiosity and leads her, at the order of her managing editor, to go to the principality of Gretzhoffen to place out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed, and on arrival in Gretzhoffen her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin begin.

TENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Missing Victim.

"What's all this?" repeated the prefect hotly, looking from one to the other of the group about him. "Would any of you make a mockery of the law?"

In turn the members of the unwilling and ill-assorted party gazed at him and at one another.

Kitty Gray alone seemed to bring to the situation a different point of view. For just one instant she was of the belief that some hoax indeed had been committed here by her servant, perhaps in the interest of herself. But the heavy frown of the officer fixed upon her face sobered her quickly enough.

In turn she cast a glance upon Roleau and raised her brows in query, but that faithful soul only shook his head to signify his own ignorance of the nature of this new mystery.

"Which of you has undertaken this sorry jest?" demanded the prefect again. "Come, now, there was murder here. The town is afoot over it. And now we come here and are told there is no murder, or at least no victim of one! Where is the body? You said you saw the man lying here."

He spoke to Roleau.

"Your excellency, so he was," replied the latter. "He lay here on the floor—directly where you see this stain. This man here was bending over him when I caught him. He was searching for something on the body. It lay directly here when I left this room, Monsieur le Prefect. That is all I can say."

The prefect in anger turned to Blake, the apache leader. "What do you say?" he demanded.

"That I should be set free!" smiled the latter, showing his ragged teeth.

"You, woman—" the chief turned once more to the incoherent maid who stood wringing her hands—"what do you mean by coming with such an alarm, when there is no proof of need?"

"But I saw him lying there on the floor—there was blood—"

"But blood alone does not make a crime. There must be also the body of the crime itself. We must make further search. You will all remain in custody until we have looked further. You will all go with us to the Hotel de Ville for the further examination. We must find what bottom there is to all this."

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Prefect," here interrupted the deep voice of the Count Frederick. "You will do nothing of the kind so far as I am concerned, and so far as this young woman here is concerned."

The face of the prefect flushed in surprise. "How now, Monsieur le Comte? You speak somewhat boldly, it seems to me."

"There is no need for argument over it," resumed Count Frederick. "I was not here, as you well know, when this crime was alleged to be committed—your men found me elsewhere almost at the moment of the crime itself. My own people can tell you where I was all the day before that moment. Moreover, this young woman was not here, as I can testify—she was at my house. As to this man, whose name is Roleau, he was a servant at one time. I cannot say where he has been all the morning, but he was in my house, and apparently had been for some time when your men arrested us there—this young woman, myself and him."

"True, true," rejoined the official, "but all these things may come out at the examination."

"We are not bound to join you in this examination," rejoined Count Frederick coldly. "So far as this nobleman of our sister kingdom is concerned it is something of an indignity to hold him on any charge which perhaps may not be made good. Would you think it well for our government to be obliged to apologize to that of Grahoffen at this time?"

The prefect hesitated for an instant, pondering which horn of a possible dilemma would be safest for him. "At least I may call upon his majesty himself to declare his will," said he at length.

"Then lose no time," said Count Frederick sternly. "I fancy that his chamberlains, if you use my name, will carry any message to his majesty from us at once. We are to remain here safely—and you yourself may take up the question of the message to the palace. Tell his majesty that Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen and Miss Gray of America are held here, suspects, under so grave and so absurd a

charge as that of murder. Say to him that we give our honor that we know nothing of it."

"But, monsieur, that picture—" Count Frederick now flushed and frowned in sudden anger.

"True, the picture, I admit that I have it. I admit freely that I came to this room and took that picture without process of law—I make no denial of that in the presence of its late owner. It interested me—I took it—I will make such reparation as need be for that. But that has nothing to do with the crime of murder. You have not connected my name or hers with that. You shall not detain us under any trumped up, imaginary cause which may please you, eager to find some victim of the law."

Glancing from one to the other dubiously, the prefect at length turned to the door, making a sign to his subordinates.

"Hold these prisoners here," said he, "until I return. I will make such haste as I can—there shall a messenger go to the royal palace, and meantime I will see if I can save any more time by finding the king's servants by use of the telephone from the hotel rooms below."

Left presently alone, for a time the uncongenial party sat or stood about as best they might, moodily awaiting the issue of the chief's errand.

Kitty felt her eyes turning again and again to the grave face of Count Frederick himself, whose own glances were averted from her. How calm he seemed, how strong, how resourceful—these thoughts came to her mind. Without him now in this last desperate coil of circumstances regarding the Gretzhoffen coin, where would she be? What hope would she dare entertain?

Count Sachio paced about or sat, head in hand, brooding over the delicate nature of his own situation.

Of all those thus strangely gathered here only one seemed to feel anything but suspicion or despair!—the apache leader, who remained under guard in the hall, somewhat apart from the others.

A considerable time had elapsed, how long none of these might have said, when the air was split by a sudden shrill whistle which came from the hall beyond the door.

Blake, bidding his time, appraising the proper instant, had given the signal of his tribe.

The result was confusion to all but him. It was as though the call of Rhoderick Dhu had been repeated, summoning armed men from every rock and bush about. For now, instantly, swiftly, it seemed as though



But Roleau Shook His Head.

every hiding place in these small apartments produced an armed man! Without doubt the apache band had laid siege to Kitty Gray's apartments, and with no intent of failure.

The high voice of one of the apaches was first. "You, all of you, quick—I have no time to trifle with you. I want the coin—which of you has it?"

The apache's gaze turned from Count Sachio's face to that of Count Frederick, and then again from Kitty to Roleau. But none of these made answer. Not one made him sure as to any specific guess.

"What, you refuse—you do not have it—all of you? I know as I stand here the coin is in this room at this moment—some one of you has it—it is worth your life not to own up to that."

Kitty's eyes despairingly sought those of Roleau, but the fighting face of that belligerent showed no sign of war. Count Frederick looked at her, anxiety upon his face, but made no sign which could catch her attention. He was not indeed entirely sure that she had the coin in her possession.

"Search them all, men," came the quick order of the rat-faced apache, who was now in charge of this situation. "We must hurry. Be careful now."

The men who had covered the prisoners with their weapons now sent forward some of their number to carry out these orders. As they advanced Roleau sprang toward them, but was held back by the hand of the captain of gendarmes.

"Quiet!" said the latter. "Would you have some of us killed? This man wants only a bit of coin. In the name of heaven, to give that is cheaper than to get killed!"

Roleau fell back, and the work of the searchers went on. But it was not money that the apaches sought. They took little count of the contents of the pockets which they ransacked.

They turned at last to Kitty, and the swift flush on her face kindled their eyes with a suspicion of some guilty knowledge on her part. She had not had time since palming the piece of coin at the time of the original search to conceal it elsewhere than in her handbag. It was a foregone conclusion that it would be found there. The thieves gave exultant exclamations when at length they saw the fruit of their efforts—the piece of broken coin. The man who searched Kitty's bag held it up, grinning.

Before any had time to form a plan there came a sudden cry from one or more of the apaches. An instant later and all of them were gone—passing out the open window to the fire escape which led to the street below.

"By the Lord!" exclaimed Sachio, the first to speak. "That was sudden work." He turned to Count Frederick, a certain anxiety in his own gaze, for he might well fancy that the latter held him in no too safe a position of friendship, since his own late ransacking of the count's palace here in Gretzhoffen town.

"Who were they, think you?" inquired Sachio.

"Who?" replied Count Frederick. "They are thieves of our beloved city of Gretzhoffen—a part of organized society as it exists here, my friend, and well organized, as is easy to be seen. Blake, yonder, is their leader. His home is in the edge of this city, and his hand is ready enough, he thinks, for any crime. Fifty, a hundred men or more are under his orders. Apparently he has laid his plans well, and his rats."

"And when was that, Monsieur le Comte?"

"At no long time ago I paid him a visit," said Count Frederick, shrugging. "I learned enough to be ready to suspect that man yonder or any of his tribe. They have broken and entered these apartments. Within our view they have committed robbery from the person of this young woman here. They have obviously taken what they sought—whatever that may be. I trust it was of no consequence, mademoiselle!"

Kitty took her cue from the calm speech of the count, her late rival, but now rather her friend than this other nobleman of Grahoffen.

She only in turn shrugged her own shoulders and turned a somewhat reproachful gaze upon the officers of the law, who stood about, helpless and chagrined.

Count Frederick smiled. "This," said he, "is somewhat of a jest. It seems to me that our friends the gendarmes submitted somewhat easily. At least they have gone—they have taken what they liked, and they have carried off their dead from the field—if there have been dead here. Have you any notion beyond this, my dear Sachio?"

But Count Sachio, thus smilingly adored, could add nothing to the fund of information. He himself was left alone. If his own man had been the victim, so much the worse for the man himself. But these reflections caused him no satisfaction.

"We must be out of this now," he exclaimed angrily, and strode toward the door. He fung it open, almost in the face of the prefect, who was hurrying back to his demoralized associates in the administration of the law.

The face of the prefect himself was red with chagrin as he now strode in at the open door.

"Gentlemen," said he, facing Count Frederick. "I have indeed received a message from the king. It is entirely in your favor."

"His majesty says, of course—" began Count Sachio.

The prefect frowned, and turned again to Count Frederick. "His majesty says Count Frederick and the young woman are to be set free at once. They are to go where they like, in full possession of their liberty."

"As for this nobleman"—and he turned to Count Sachio at last. "I am instructed to set him free also, and to ask him not to add further complicating circumstances by too long a tarrying on this scene."

"But tell me—why do you stand here gazing thus?" he demanded of his men. So then they were obliged to tell him of what had transpired during his brief absence.

"Escaped—you allowed them to come here and rob you in broad daylight—to add yet another crime to that which has been committed here—and then you my men, allow them to escape even from that, and without pursuit? Surely this day the law is humbled and abased in our sight. Monsieur le Comte, you will pardon me if I say that I had rather return to my office now than to linger here."

"But someone killed that man," broke out the hysterical maid, who all this time had been lingering about. "Yes," said the prefect gravely,



They Too Were on the Train.

that is true. There was a victim here—and yonder lies proof enough of that. Someone must have killed him. Someone must know about that. Detail two men." He motioned to Roleau and the renegade, who still had been retained in custody in the hall, by guards who had not dared to enter the room.

Now for the first time Kitty Gray rose above her fears, excited at this sudden danger to her faithful servant.

"What do you mean?" demanded she of the prefect. "This is my servant Roleau. He is innocent as a babe. He has been with me all the day, every moment of the day since I left my room. We were together when we were taken in charge. He even brought to you the man who was in this room. Why do you accuse him?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Hidden Thief.

As he turned from the room where these late exciting scenes had occurred, there was one—Count Frederick—who gazed back with a look of inquiry to the solitary occupant who tarried there. Kitty Gray, wrapped in her own anxieties, did not catch this look of solitude, but as they all passed out and left her to her own devices, robbed now even of the aid of her faithful servant, she cast herself upon a couch in sudden access of apprehension.

Then she paused, her breath held, her heart stifling her lungs for just an instant. It seemed to her that she felt in the couch beneath her some suspicious movement—yes, it must be so! She sprang across the room to the door, her first instinct that of flight, but halted and found concealment beyond the first curtain of the alcove. Her eyes were fastened on the cover of the couch which but now she had occupied.

Yes, she saw the lid move, saw a hand appear beneath its edge—saw a man slowly crowd himself out from this hiding place within the body of the couch! It was the face of one of the apache band—a face that she saw turned questioning into the room, which evidently he thought now vacant. Surely Blake had abundant reason he himself did not tarry. A moment, and he was out of the window and passed from sight as had his fellows.

There was no time for Kitty to call for aid, even had there been aid which she could have summoned. She wasted no time in fruitless, but her own fashion of self-help, resolved to lose no opportunity to end certain of these complexities. Without time for thought she sprang after the man, no definite plan in her mind. As she did so, she called out once more, almost by instinct, upon the one friend who thus far had not failed her. "Roleau!" she cried, "Roleau!"

But the faithful Roleau did not hear his mistress's summons him. By this time he was in the front part of the hotel, himself in charge of the officers of the law.

On his way to the station house in charge of the gendarmes he weighed deliberately the chances of success one bold man might have against these others now torn by indecision; for certainly the gendarmes themselves had come out of this with none too much glory, and were in no too good conceit of themselves. They walked loosely, heads down, dreading what lay ahead. It was no great feat for Roleau, half guarded, to spring away from them at speed, and once more to gain the front of the hotel. He passed rapidly to the desk.

"Padron," he said to the clerk who stood there, himself irresolute, "the captain has asked me to inquire of her excellency—" and he did not step to specify as to the nature of that inquiry. He sprang to the stair, undeterred, ran down the hall, and once more found open the door of the room which but now he had left.

He entered eagerly, gazed about him—and stood dumfounded for a moment. There was no trace of his mistress. The room once more was altogether empty.

To him there was only one conclu-

sion possible. Certainly his mistress had not come out by the front hall, therefore she must have passed out by yonder window, which had offered exit to the intruders. The next moment Roleau himself was through the same window and hurrying down the fire escape which he saw now gave access to the street. By the time the captain of the guard and his hurrying men were close on his track at the hotel desk, Roleau once more was free.

The scene of action of all this was now but transferred from the rear to the front of the hotel, where, not apprehending the presence of others, the parties of this drama met without plan. Count Frederick had halted, reluctant to leave the young girl in such a time of distress. Count Sachio, looking about him for some sign of the man who he knew had the coin he coveted, also stood irresolute at the curb. Kitty, pursuing the flying thief—and after her now Roleau—paused as they saw others ahead. It seemed to Roleau when he first caught sight of the excellency whom he served that she was waiting for someone, holding back for some purpose of her own.

The flying apache passed close to Count Sachio. He halted at some quick word, some sudden sign which the nobleman gave to him. Roleau saw them converse for just a moment—saw Sachio pass money to the flying thief, and then motion him to speed on his way. Roleau saw Sachio look at his hand, hurriedly clasp it shut, and thrust it into his pocket—saw him in turn beckon to his own man, Bartel, his late agent in certain of these affairs.

This could indicate but one thing. Sachio had obtained possession of the coin, had transferred it to his messenger! And now they saw that messenger hasten to the nearest motor car standing at the curb.

Another car stood, as yet unoccupied, and toward this now started three persons—Count Frederick, Kitty Gray, and Roleau, the idea of pursuit being foremost in the mind of each of these three. But Kitty Gray, rejoiced at finding her servant once more at her side—for now Roleau had hastened forward—was of no mind to take any other ally into her own plans. Even as the agent of Count Sachio sprang into the car, they rushed swiftly to that approached by Count Frederick, and with more force than politeness pushed that gentleman aside, sprang in, and made such argument to the driver of the car that he was off at speed within the next moment.

"Quick, Roleau!" called Kitty Gray. "Make him drive—that man is Bartel, the partner of Count Sachio. He is bound for the train—he has the coin, I am sure, and he means to take it to the kingdom of Grahoffen. Once there, it is lost to us. Quick, he must not beat us to the train!"

So rapidly had these events occurred that she scarcely had time for thought.

"In two hours, or three at most—if that man catches the train—the coin will be in Cortislaw's hands, and out of our reach forever. Drive, Roleau—make him drive!"

Therefore, what Count Frederick, left alone in the street, was forced to see was the spectacle of those two hurrying vehicles leaving him to his own devices. He looked about him hurriedly for some means of locomotion of his own, and his gaze fell upon a horse standing at the curb. In default of better means, he sprang to the saddle, and himself was off in such pursuit as he could compass.

Bartel, the Gretzhoffen agent, was in no mood to delay. He urged his own car hard, and hastened toward the station of the little railway which, as Kitty and Roleau both knew, led to Grahoffen around the northern extremity of the neutral strip, close in under the shoulders of the little mountains.

There stood in the station now, attached to the fuming engine, a mixed train, partly made of coaches, partly of flats, apparently ready to depart. Bartel approached the guard rapidly. What he said no one heard, but an instant later the guard had received from Bartel a telegram, had transferred it to the station agent, and himself was blowing the signal for the starting of the train—perhaps some minutes before the regular

schedule time. Ah well, what might not one do for these of the nobility! The motor which bore Kitty and Roleau whirled into the station an instant too late, or so it seemed. The race seemed lost, and recovery of it beyond hope.

"Quick, Roleau, close to the tracks!" commanded Kitty Gray. "Drive, drive—they are not out of the switch yards yet."

With Roleau's revolver muzzle at his back, the driver obeyed his orders. Neck and neck he raced the passing train, drew alongside just close enough for one desperate leap. His passengers took it. An instant later he was alone. They two were on the train!

As for Count Frederick, he pounded along hopelessly distanced in this race. He saw what had occurred, but could do no more than accept the facts as they were.

But Count Frederick himself was no irresolute soul, and moreover he knew his country well enough. He did not pull up now, but rode off through the town, across the country, taking the arc of the great semicircle which he knew the train must make where the line curved around the northern extremity of the uncultivated plains.

On the train Bartel, the king's coin in his own possession, sat well enough content with the turn of his fortunes. He knew that a few hours now would place him in safety—and knew that more than safety would await his arrival in Grahoffen with the coin. Perhaps Cortislaw would reward him in measure even beyond that awarded to his superior, Count Sachio. Surely there would be promotion for him, pay of material sort.

He had not seen the desperate means employed by Kitty and Roleau to board the same train—did not know that even as he sat comfortably smoking and complacently looking forward to the future, these two pursuers were but a coach or so in the rear, making plans of their own.

"Remain, excellency," said Roleau at length. "Let me go forward alone—he may be hard to handle, for surely he will not give up what he has except with stiff resistance."

"I shall go also," said Kitty stoutly. "I must see how it goes on—no one can tell what next may happen to the coin—I must be there to see it all. Nevertheless, I thank you for your chivalry, Roleau—you bring to mind the men of my own country."

A flush of pleasure came to the face of the honest fellow at words of praise whose like he had never heard in all his life.

"Come, then," said he, "at least there is no chance for him to escape from us."

"But, excellency," he added as they passed the window in the next car forward, "look! What is that?"

She followed his gesture, and looked out across the rugged landscape in which they now found themselves. Ahead, coming at reckless



They All Passed Out and Left Her to Her Own Devices.

speed down the face of the steep grade, rode a man whose going was fast and furious. He rode a horse spent almost to his limit, but rode so recklessly as showed disregard of his own life and that of his mount as well.

"He is going to be killed!" cried Kitty. "Look, it is the Count Frederick—how has he come here?"

Roleau suppressed an exclamation. "By the short road across the bend—how did he happen to think of it! But he is helpless!"

And so it seemed—the rider, who did not draw rein, but spurred furiously on down the slope—seemed riding to his death.

But once more courage proved its own best defense. The rider came head on toward the train, paused on the cut just above it—spurred forward recklessly, and pulling his staggering horse together leaped boldly out and forward—those who looked through the window could not tell with what result.

"Now," said Roleau, "we have a dead man for sure. Dead or alive, there are two men on the train with whom we must account. There will be work for us, excellency, that is sure."

Kitty Gray turned a pale face toward him. "He took his chance like a man," said she. "I hope—"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)