

The Broken Coin

A Story of Mystery and Adventure
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From the Scenario by Grace Cunard

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 piece 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.

TWELFTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XLIII.

The Sins of War.

It was touch and go between the two little kingdoms for a time. Their troops had faced each other in the open field. Blood had been shed. Generals had looked other generals in the eye at no great distance. At the lines of contact the imperial rulers of the two countries had been within earshot one of the other.

Yet they parted now. Why? The trumpets sounded the recall, even as the leaders were awaiting the summons for the charge. Why? At least one ruler had been eager for the assault, yet did not advance his troops. Why? The other, vacillating as ever of soul, none the less had been upon the battle front itself, whether or not his courage had been more than temporary. He now retired. Why?

The answer to all these questions lay in the hands of the young American girl. Sundered, the two halves of the divided Gretzhoffen coin still pleaded for reunion. One lay in the grasp of another. Had either kingdom on this day owned them both, war would have ensued.

Cortislav of Grahoffen, old as he was, none the less was in respect of martial nature far in advance of the weak ruler of Gretzhoffen. Michael had come to the rescue not so much to save Count Frederick from danger as to save Count Frederick for himself. He needed Frederick's courage. Not so Cortislav, who retired to his own city fuming and full of ire. Evil was that hour for the courtiers of Grahoffen, and worst of all for the unfortunate Sachio, who had promised so much for his sovereign and himself, and who had come so far short of the measure of his promises.

"Believe me, my good friend Sachio," exclaimed Cortislav, when at length that crestfallen individual was brought before him. "Your failure to bring me the missing half of the coin has well-nigh cost me my dignity and your life. I will not longer suffer such disappointments at your hands."

"Your majesty," began Sachio, but the other raised a hand.

"We are at the brink of war now—at any moment war may be forced on us, whether we like it or not. I did not think Michael would march, but he has shown that under certain circumstances he not only can but will. If we delay we lose all the advantages of the initiative. None can tell what yonder Count Frederick will do, for at least he does not lack courage. And now he will be eager for revenge against us for the danger in which we have placed him."

"It was a danger shared by all those who engaged in the struggle for the coin," said Sachio. "We had it



Convinced Count Frederick the Room Was Empty.

in our own hands. We brought it to the very edge of our throne; it was in our country when they took it once more."

"Yes, and those persons were persons that had no more at stake than you have, Count Sachio," broke in Cortislav, with the cold wrath his officers knew so well. "Have they more reason for success than you? Are they of greater wit than yourself? By the Lord! If those things be so, 'tis time we had better wits about us than such as yours."

Sachio hung his head, but found no speech in answer and the king went on:

"Listen now." He beckoned about him other officers of his court, and held out before him in his palm the half coin which had come into his possession. "See what this says—it talks of treas-

ure—treasure! We know that the Gretzhoffen treasure is enormous—we know that it is concealed in the torture chamber, whatever or wherever that may be. Beyond that we know no more. It is the other half of the coin alone that can tell us what we covet now. This half but whets our anger until we have the mate for it.

"Now, my noblemen, you who pretend to serve me and this people, once more I warn you—yonder half coin, or your resignations—or your heads."

His officials left him, all in a state bordering upon consternation, for they knew that this king was not one soon forgetful of his hatred or his revenge. They laid their heads together, Sachio desperately anxious now, and tried their best to formulate some plan. All they could conclude was that the coin had found its way back to Gretzhoffen once more in the possession of the persons who so stoutly had defended it.

Meantime these were far away as time had allowed them. The walls of Gretzhoffen sheltered now both Kitty Gray and Roleau. Close behind these rode King Michael at the head of his troops, at his side the man whose danger had called him forth—none less than Count Frederick himself.

"My dear count," exclaimed Michael in his own very pretty opinion of his prowess, "all is well that ends well. Did you not note the speed with which we came to rescue you? Was it not all magnificent?"

"Yes," replied the count. "The wit of yonder girl—her courage—they were indeed magnificent."

"Her wit? Her courage?" "Pardon, your majesty, but was it not those things which brought you to our rescue? How else could you have known of our stress? It was she who carried the news—she, I doubt not, who also carries the coin."

"The coin? What coin? Why do you speak of it?" demanded Michael in a certain surprise. "We have that half coin in our own possession—or at least have supposed so—surely did have it but the other day. You have one half, have you not, and I the other? If either half be missing, at least I do not know where it is."

"It is in Grahoffen town this minute in every likelihood," exclaimed Count Frederick, careless of any consequences that might arise if his counterfeiting were discovered. "We had a half, that equally is sure, in our hands in the mountain fight. The young woman and myself gave it in keeping of her servant, the man Roleau—a stout fellow and a desperate fighter, as more than one of yonder army might attest."

"And where is he now?" "That is what I cannot say," rejoined the count. At the time the danger of conflict ended I turned to find him, and he was gone, as you know. We agreed that those two, Roleau and his mistress, would meet as soon as possible. My own fear is that the young woman will take ship at any time and sail for home. With her goes the secret, for very likely Roleau would go with her."

"I do not share your fears, my dear count," he said. "In my own belief the young woman will not be so apt to leave the palace presently."

"Leave the palace?" "Yes, she was in the charge of my people there even as I started out with the troops. I am thinking that a palace is a safer place than a ship for a young woman who is a stranger in a strange land—a beautiful young woman."

CHAPTER XLIV.

In the Name of the Law.

As for Roleau, now object of solicitude on the part of a nobleman and even a king, he was experiencing further adventures of his own. As soon as he had made his escape from the field where the three had so nearly met disaster, he made such speed as he could after Kitty, who, as he knew very well, would hasten as fast as might be to find some hiding for herself and the coin.

But where was she now? That he could not guess, for he had no means of learning that Kitty had been left in the palace of the king. Rather, he supposed that she would be at the hotel which she had made her residence. He bent his own steps thither as rapidly as might be.

He met only coldness at the office at that stately caravansary, the Ritz, where both he and his mistress, save for the intercession of the king, before this would have been set out in the streets bag and baggage.

"Mademoiselle, the young American excellency?" he asked of the clerk at the desk. "She is at home today?"

"We know nothing of mademoiselle, the young American excellency," replied that worthy coldly. "She left no announcement of her plans when she departed. She has not returned."

"Are you sure as to that?" demand-

ed Roleau, nonplused as to what next to do.

"I am not here to make guesses on such things," rejoined the clerk. "I know nothing, and that is something." "Nothing is enough for one of your kind to know," replied Roleau blandly. He might perhaps have engaged in still more truculent conversation with the clerk, had he not at that moment felt a hand laid on his arm.

He turned to face a sergeant of gendarmes, who drew him to one side. "In the name of the law, you are my prisoner," said the man. "Come with me."

"On what charge then, monsieur?" demanded Roleau coolly. "It is my right to know something of that, I fancy."

"The charge is murder, as you know," said the sergeant. "The same on which you were just in charge. I am to warn you once more that what you say may be used against you at the trial."

"At the trial?" exclaimed Roleau. "I thought that was all dismissed. Did we not have the king's excuse to leave? The king himself set free my master and my mistress?"

"Both your employers?" grinned the sergeant. "I am servant of both, and certainly if either went free then so should I. Is that not true?"

"It is far from true," returned the gendarme grimly; you will see how far. Murder was committed yonder by someone, as you know. You saw it—said that you saw it. The law does not set such witnesses free."

"The king sets free whom he pleases in this land," rejoined Roleau. "I shall tell my mistress of this."

"Do so," laughed the gendarme, "a rich jest enough. But first find your mistress."

Roleau found this a proposition difficult of present answer. Others of the police closing in upon him, he went with them now peacefully as he might, to the tribunal where someone must answer for the recent crime.

The prefect greeted him grimly enough, yet with a certain exultation in his mien. It was necessary in that country, as in others, that a victim should be found for the law. Perhaps in that country more than in many others, it mattered little who that victim might be.

"So we have you again, Messer Roleau?" "And why, may I ask your honor?" rejoined Roleau, innocently. "I was



"I Warn You—the Other Half of This Coin or Your Heads!"

away, true, on business in other lands—business connected with my country's welfare. Having concluded that matter I returned fast as I might, and here I am."

"Criminals always come back to the scenes of their murder," asserted the prefect pompously.

"Is that true? I did not know it. As for me, I have done no crime. I was simply looking after my mistress' affairs in her room—her excellency, the young American, who is so high in the king's good will."

"That is all very well, very well, but it is not enough, as you will see," rejoined the prefect. "The king did not set you free."

"Only because the king had not yet heard from my mistress. Give me leave to bring the two together—and that may be done—and she will set all right at once. Ask her."

"I do not need to ask her. The king has set for me the task of finding yonder murderer. I must fill that task. I have done so now."

"What—myself—I am suspected of that crime! Your honor, that is impossible. There has been no proof of any crime."

"Send to the king," he added, catching a glimpse of uncertainty on the face of the prefect. "Send to my mistress. I claim that right under the law."

"I send to the king?" demanded the prefect blustering. "Why should I? I can control the process of the law without troubling royalty with details of that sort."

"But suppose there are consequences. These are ticklish times, believe me, your excellency. I have seen blood deeds done today. When a king goes to war—and our king may go before long—the life of an officer left behind is worth no more to him than that of a good fighting man taken with him to the front. Perhaps as between your honor and myself—"

The official took counsel with his own caution for a moment.

"I will myself go to the palace," said he at length. "To be sure, we cannot be too careful in the attaining of the

ends of justice. If I cannot gain access to the king, I shall at least have made the attempt. If I can have an audience, I shall put something of this case before him myself. We wish not to meddle too intimately in affairs of which we do not know. But if the king disavows you—"

CHAPTER XLV.

The Chamber of Horrors.

Arrived presently in the royal palace and in the company not only of Count Frederick, but of yet other noblemen and officials, King Michael relaxed his martial front under the warming influence of the wine on which he so much relied.

"They fled," he exclaimed again and again, boastfully, as he referred to the scenes which but now he had left. "They fled before us like sheep, my dear count. With myself to lead the army—and you at my side—what chance would they have? They knew they had none, and took counsel of their wisdom for once. If they remain in that counsel, surely they will stay behind their own walls, and not give offense to our country. We would annihilate them. A half hour more, and we would have plundered their city today. Their treasure would have been ours!"

"What treasure, your majesty?" inquired Count Frederick coldly. "Would we go to war for that?"

"For what else?" smiled the king. "For liberty, justice, freedom, your majesty."

"Tut! tut! where do you get those terms? A monk speaks! But listen, did we not march to your rescue?"

"Yes, your majesty, I am not ungrateful and not unthankful. But still we lack the clue which alone can make war possible or desirable—the clue which alone has back of it motives worthy of a king and of a people."

"Well, well, what does all this mean then?" rejoined Michael, irritated. "Where do we arrive? What is it that you ask?"

"I can ask no questions and answer none, until we have found once more the young American, your majesty."

King Michael smiled in self-satisfaction at last.

"Ah, well, that is easy," said he. "I have said that she is, or should be, here in this palace. It is true she brought me the news of your plight."

Count Frederick waited for no change in the royal will, but bowed

himself from the room. Inquiry found for him presently the waiting woman in whose care Kitty had been placed, and together they approached the room where she had been left, some hours before, to her own devices.

They knocked, knocked again, and yet again—but got no answer. The woman at length opened the door with her own key. Her sudden exclamation convinced Count Frederick that the room was empty.

"She is up to her tricks," exclaimed he to himself. "Now I wonder—"

He did not pause to ask much of the waiting woman, but hurried away down the hall, intent on certain plans of his own.

He must find her, must see her at once. He had no real idea as to which course Kitty had taken after leaving the room, but alone after a time, he walked more slowly, he could not say why. Something came to his senses, as first not recognized—a faint scent—a perfume which it seemed to him he had known before—the perfume of violets, faint, indefinite, fragrant.

He found himself at length in a narrow hallway from which there were no side passages. It led him deeper back into the palace, its trend continually downward. Thus finally he found himself in the self-same subterranean tunnel which Kitty earlier had discovered.

"She was searching for the torture chamber!" said he to himself, with sudden conviction. "That is why she came here!"

He came at length to the great door which closed the passageway. Yes, in the dust before him were footprints, and in the dust on the door itself were finger prints! The silence and secrecy of ages had been broken within the hour.

He pushed open the door—pushed it until it met some obstruction—something which lay vaguely white upon the floor. He turned downward the flare of his light—started back from what he saw.

She lay at his feet, unconscious, helpless—dead, for all he could tell. He bent over her, doubt, terror in his

eyes, and reached out his hand. She stirred under his touch. Her eyes opened, looked into his. What she saw bending over her was the face of her enemy.

"Who is it?" she cried. "Loose me—leave me! Where am I?"

She caught her hands to her face now as there came to her once more the terror of what she had seen. She dared not look about her. "Take me away!" she moaned. "Take me away!"

He made no answer for a time. "Why have you followed me here?" she demanded at last, half hysterically.

He spoke now, slowly, almost solemnly. "Why?" said he. "I do not know why. I think it must have been because you were in trouble. Perhaps you called me—perhaps that is why I came."

"What do you mean? Would you taunt me now, at such a time? I have been frightened almost to the point of death—it was terrible."

"Come," said Count Frederick, and placed about her an arm on whose strength, in spite of herself, she was glad to lean.

He was guiding her toward the door. She turned and saw again that which but now had smitten her with terror. Her nerves, weakened by the long strain upon them, gave way once more.

The flare of the candle lighted up the cavernous interior at whose entrance they stood. Count Frederick saw what she had seen.

On the walls stood out hooks, steel arms which supported eyeless, grinning skulls—old—how old no one could tell. Beyond arose rods and gratings, barbed, pointed, curved. An iron chair was in a corner, and in it sat a grinning skeleton.

It was the torture chamber, the room of horrors, born of other years more savage than these, and brought down unchanged through all the centuries!

"Come," said Count Frederick, his own voice agitated. "It is no time to think of any treasure now, but you—yourself!"

He caught her away swiftly into the other passage, and flung the door shut behind them. In silence he led her along the subterranean passage and up the stairs.

He left her once more alone in her own room, to compose herself as best she might, while he went on to rejoin the king.

"So, then, you found her, faithful messenger?" demanded Michael. "Yes, your majesty, at length. She was but strolling about to pass the time during your absence. While I know little of such matters, it seems to me that the trials of the day have been extreme for her."

King Michael ended by asking the attendance of the young woman herself, but it was just at this juncture that there arrived at the palace none less than the prefect of police, who made supplication through several court officials for admittance to audience with royalty.

"He says," ventured the last chamberlain, "that he comes regarding the murder at the Ritz hotel, in which your majesty was graciously pleased to be interested."

"Yes, yes—my dear Count Frederick, it was absurd that you should be mixed in that—or the young American—I have not had time to think of it since then. What is all this now? Bring the man in."

And so presently the prefect, abashed and much perturbed, was admitted.

"Well, well," demanded the monarch, "what is it—why do you come here?"

"For only one reason, your majesty," began the prefect humbly. "We are convinced that there is more than chance medley in this murder. The thing goes deeper than we thought at first."

"Have you no suspect?" "One, your majesty, a person of no importance, by name Roleau."

"How now, count?" Michael turned to the nobleman who still stood near. "What think you of this matter?"

"Count Frederick considered for a moment before he replied. "Set him free," said he at length. "Watch him. He will lead us to something perhaps. Be sure that once he is loose he will not be at rest for long."

"An excellent idea," said Michael. Michael turned now to the matters closer to his heart—the welfare of the young American, whom he had not seen since his return to the palace. Even now she waited for admission to his presence, and he had her summoned at once.

"What! mademoiselle," cried Michael, "you are pale. You have not yet fully recovered—you have been ill?"

"Yes, your majesty," replied Kitty, smiling somewhat wanly. He now noticed that the serving woman at her side carried her wraps, and that she herself appeared ready for the street.

"What! you mean to leave us?" exclaimed he. "What does this mean?"

"Your majesty," said Kitty, "graciously allow me my absence for the time. I must return to my hotel."

It was with deep relief that finally Kitty found herself once more freed of the royal presence and the royal palace. She sped, fast as might be, back to her hotel.

Count Frederick excused himself but a moment later. To the king he announced his intention of returning to his own home. Instead, he made his way also to the Ritz hotel.

The clerk at the hotel was more deferential to the nobleman than he had been to the nobleman's servant a trifle earlier.

"Her excellency, the young Ameri-

can? But now she came—she may be in her room—we shall see. Shall she join you in the parlors, Monsieur le Comte?"

"In the parlors on the floor above," replied Count Frederick, rather vaguely, and passed up the broad stair. But he had certain plans of his own which did not include a public audience with the young American. Instead, he passed boldly down the hall. Before the door at which he would have announced himself he paused. He could not well escape detection if he turned back, for the voices of others came to him down the hall. And in the room beyond the door he heard another voice—apparently she was using the telephone. Yes, it was she. He waited for an instant, and found himself without intention in possession of what she said.

Kitty at the time, in fact, was telephoning to the headquarters of police asking for knowledge of her servant Roleau. Her voice went on now rapid, staccato.

"Monsieur, he was freed, Roleau—yes, yes—what then? On probation?—yes, I know. He was here—he was followed to the hotel—he was followed

to the rendezvous of the apaches—yes, yes—by whom?—why? He is there now, perhaps?—Ah, bah! what manner of officers are you? What is your plan in all this—to have him killed by thieves in turn?"

Count Frederick paused to hear no more, but flushed guiltily over his eavesdropping retraced his steps down the hall and sought more decorous means of meeting the young woman whom he wished to see. But even as he did so he reflected that from the detached exclamations he had heard surely she was planning yet other adventures. If Roleau had been here—if he had been followed away by the police toward the thieves' headquarters—surely this undaunted girl would in turn do what she could to rescue him. If so, once more she herself would need assistance.

Count Frederick stepped to one side in the hotel lobby and bided his time. It was as he thought. Before long Kitty hastened through the lobby and out toward the street. Evidently she had paused to make no more than slight changes in her toilet. Beyond question the purpose in her mind was to find Roleau.

Count Frederick strolled toward the desk and nodded pleasantly to the questioning clerk. "Yes," said he, "I was so fortunate—"

He did not pause to say definitely in what way he had been fortunate, but, unhurried, strolled down the steps into the street, intent on nothing so much as upon discovering what Kitty Gray next would do.

It was now a curious train that of those persons engaged in the search for the mysterious coin. Roleau had indeed found an occupant in the room of his mistress when he hastened thither the moment he was released from custody. That occupant, however, was not his mistress, but another—none less than a member of the apache band who had held her apartments under espionage. Roleau, hiding himself, waited for the appearance of the intruder—followed him out from the hall into the street. This had been but the moment before Kitty's return. The prefect had ordered Roleau's discharge by telephone from the palace, almost as she was leaving, and both she and Roleau had hastened to the hotel.

Now, as Kitty emerged, followed by Count Frederick, yet another one of Blake's underworld band stepped out from his hiding place and followed Count Frederick himself. And all of these, each was in pursuit of the coveted Gretzhoffen coin.

As for Roleau, his man made rapid progress, and it was not long before he had trailed him to the rendezvous of the band which he himself previously had learned. Undaunted, he would have pursued the fugitive to the inner chamber of the rendezvous had not he heard a sound which caused him to pause.

It was at this time that Blake, leader of the band of thieves, chanced to return to the rendezvous. He had passed part way into the subterranean passage when he looked on ahead just in time to see one of his men emerge from the central room and make a spring at an intruder whom he himself at once recognized as the man who at this very scene earlier had given him so desperate a battle—who later had given him into the hands of the law.

Thinking only of revenge now, forgetting the coin, the renegade leader whipped out his revolver and fired point blank at Roleau.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



It Was the Torture Chamber—the Room of Terrors!