

The BROKEN COIN

By EMERSON HOUGH

From the Scenario by GRACE CUNARD
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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 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.

THIRTEENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XLVI.

By Process of Elimination.

The weapon of the renegade leader Blake was aimed steadily enough. But the fraction of time in which Roleau changed the position he had taken saved the life of one man and cost that of another.

It was the fellow thief, Blake's comrade, fresh from the rendezvous, who fell under the bullet intended for Roleau himself.

Blake sprang forward, groping under cover of the smoke, to find the body of his enemy, stooped, paused, sprang back—it was not Roleau, but his own man whom he had slain!

Roleau by this time, with no more than a quick flash of self-congratulation at his unexpected safety, had sprung away. Blake called out to his followers and started after Roleau. He did not meet him at the outer opening, but ran into the arms of the band of gendarmes who had followed Roleau hither.

Seeing the renegade, pistol in hand, and knowing that he had fired the shot just heard, the sergeant seized upon Blake and disarmed him. The apache leader fought with all the bitter desperation of his kind when cornered, crying aloud for help. His cries brought others of the band, who joined in the melee, so that the issue for a time was in doubt as between the lawful and the lawless—these last two factions who were locked in struggle by reason of the fortunes of the missing coin.

At this juncture Roleau flung himself into the conflict. His giant strength proved such aid that finally the sergeant and his men had subdued not only Blake the leader, but others of his band. As for Roleau, he stood grinning at the turn of events and making no further attempt at escape. Neither did the officer make any movement to apprehend him again.

"Come with me, then, my friend," said the officer. "You have fought well for me. We shall see what we shall see."

Wherefore Roleau, no longer under espionage, went back with the gendarmes toward the headquarters of the prefecture.

Much of this was noted by Kitty Gray herself, who arrived upon the scene in time to witness this not unhappy end of her own quest. Count

pleating factors here in his own business of finding a victim for the law. "What do you say now to this, sir?"—he accosted Roleau. "I say now, your excellency, that yonder thief and leader of thieves, who tried to kill me, knows all there is to be known of the murder. He can tell, if he likes, or if he does not like. He wanted there what we wanted—we will call it a jewel that he sought in her gracious excellency's rooms. He guessed that it might have value with persons high in power in this country. That is why he followed us; that is why murder was done there. They all sought something, and we know what it was."

"You are the accused," said the prefect, turning swiftly to Blake, his own decision made. "What have you to say? Why do you not speak? Confess that you know the secret of yonder murder—the motive for which we ourselves now know. I know you, Blake. Your band is broken now. How do you wish to spend the rest of your life—would you purchase a few more moments at the price of a confession of the truth? Perhaps that may be, when you have tasted the dungeon—away from that drug you crave—for a few hours."

"I will confess," suddenly exclaimed the king of the apaches, his face gray with terror. "I will tell you everything—only give me—it."

"Then you killed the man in yonder room?"

Blake tried to speak, but only nodded. Then at length, hoarsely, "It is as he said. What can I gain by delay or by denial? Give me—that! Give me—it! I confess it all."

"What was your motive, then, Blake?"

"You heard it. He told you. I wanted what they had—the coin—the Gretzhoffen coin."

"As to the coin, your honor," broke in the deep voice of Count Frederick at this time, "I submit there is no need of examination of anyone in regard to that."

The prefect looked at him, willing to punish any who cast slight upon his power, but knowing himself helpless. Count Frederick smiled icily in turn.

"Shall we three bid you good day, your honor?"

The prefect bowed politely as he might.

Count Frederick only smiled, and turned toward the door. He stepped back, gravely, allowing Kitty Gray to pass. After her followed the faithful Roleau. Frederick smiled again, and looked after the two not unhappily, although he saw where the greater allegiance of his former servant now lay.

"At last, Roleau!" exclaimed Kitty, eagerly, when finally they two were alone at their hotel. "We are free, all of us—you, and I, and—"

find some solution to the problem of finding the coin. Where was it? How could it be gained? Upon Count Sachio more than upon any nobleman of the court this question rested grievously. He enlisted therefore as his confederate a man belonging to the secret police in Grahoffen, Ladislav, a cunning chap with courage.

"Ladislav," said he, "we must go to Gretzhoffen at once. The coin is there. Either that young woman has it or Count Frederick, or the king. The latter is most likely of the three."

It came out much as Sachio had reasoned. In the confusion now prevailing in Gretzhoffen the two passed unchallenged even to the palace door.

As for the king, he was by this time well forward in his wine. He received Sachio and his friend readily enough. Little it mattered to him who came, for all were welcome. He reproved for his hesitation the chamberlain who announced Sachio.

"Let him come to us," said he. "Let them all come. They are welcome. Sachio?—yes, many a bottle we two have split together."

Not one, but more than one bottle, forsooth, did they two split between them now, and meantime Ladislav, secret agent, unnoticed, was here and there, in this room and others, unmolessted, as a friend of the king, and busy with purposes of his own.

In the chambers of the king all was given over to wine and boastfulness. There was one who did not accept thus lightly the issue of the day. Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen, most serious of mind by this time, had turned his steps toward the palace, pondering many things meantime. It was now his own deliberate purpose to demand some decision of his monarch as to the eminent enterprise with which all Gretzhoffen was soon to be concerned. He had given orders, as an officer of the army high in power, to mobilize all the forces of the kingdom.

And even as these plans quietly went forward here, King Cortislav of Grahoffen was pacing his floor, consumed with wrath of a sort not easily placated. "Listen, gentlemen," said he to his officers who gathered about him after Sachio had departed. "Why do you wait. We will win all, or we will lose all today. March then! Cortislav calls every man under arms to join the colors now!"

Thus, as Count Frederick made his way to the palace, the military forces of both countries were making ready for a struggle which might soon ensue. He passed almost without plan, toward that portion of the palace where he knew he would find King Michael. But at a moment when he was alone and passing near a door which made off from the hall, he heard voices—one voice which suddenly he had conviction was familiar to him—the deep voice of Sachio of Grahoffen! He held his breath that he might catch every word that came from the room within.

"Listen! Ladislav," he heard Sachio say. "What did you tell me that you had it? Give it to me, in my hand! It cannot be true."

"None the less, it is true," said another voice, that of the man called Ladislav. Apparently he held out something which both regarded.

"Ladislav, you have won fortune for us both. There is no price can be put upon this half of the coin. It is ours, at last."

Count Frederick smiled to himself—smiled for an instant only.

"Yes, Sachio," he heard the answer. "Now if we had our other half here, we could join the two."

"I do not need it," exclaimed Sachio, exultantly. "I have it in my head. I know the reading of both. It tells of the secret recess under the floor of the torture chamber."

Count Frederick heard Sachio laugh deeply—heard his voice once more, self-satisfied.

"Never again," said Sachio, "will I abuse good wine! It fuddled a king for our use and benefit today."

"You are going—there?"

"Yes. To the last hiding place of what we seek."

"Admit her at once, yes—why do you delay?"

She came before him now, pale, downcast, almost trembling. Heavy enough had been the burden of anxiety she long had carried. She had come to the king, but she sought not this weak king's comforting. No, she had come hither in search of the man on whom even the king must rely.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he began, half maudlin, "you have come to us at last. Why were you so absurdly long? We have grieved for you, and who would grieve the king?"

"Your majesty," said Kitty Gray, and half shuddered as she gave the title, gazing as she did upon the bloated face of this man who claimed to be a king. "Your majesty, you are more than kind to remember so unimportant a person."

"Unimportant! Do not say that word. Unimportant—when all we have thought of was yourself. What has kept you away?—though I am sure you came as soon as you could."

"Yes, your majesty, as soon as I could."

"And because you have heard of what we have done today, of how we have routed the army of yonder King Cortislav—it was cleverly done, mademoiselle, though I do say it."

"And what of him who was with you, your majesty?"

"Whom do you mean? Count Sachio?"

"Count Sachio? Was he here, your majesty? I meant another."

"Ah, always you mean that other. Always he seeks to come between his king and his king's desire," said he, complainingly.

"And what is it that your majesty desires?"

"Why, my majesty desires a many things, my dear," he replied, in vinous liberty. "My majesty desired, a while

"It is dark," said Sachio, laughing lightly, and hesitating. "What is there in there?"

"It might be the very torture chamber of old Gretzhoffen, my dear Sachio! It might be the treasure chamber of the king himself—the old king! It might be here that were concealed the treasures of Gretzhoffen—is it not true? You know of them?"

"I have never heard of them, my dear Frederick," replied Sachio.

"Not so, my friend. You have half the coin. It is but counterfeit. The true half—that half which you sought in my quarters so feloniously—is in possession of another."

"You mean that wench—that American—"

It was that instant that the heavy hand of Count Frederick smote him full in the face. "You shall not mention her!" he growled; and the next instant he had Sachio by the shoulders and was thrusting him with all his power toward the open door. It had all along been his intention to imprison Sachio here in the torture chamber.

The next moment Count Frederick felt at his back the impact of another man. The three struggled furiously.

"Quick! Shoot him!" panted Sachio. "Kill him! I cannot last!"

"I am not armed," cried Ladislav. "Let me search."

Frederick felt the hands of his new enemy feeling at his pockets, searching for some weapon, and rejoiced that he also at the moment was unarmed. At least the conflict would be more even now.

But they were more than a match for him. Count Frederick felt an arm throttle him, felt his eyes almost start from his head, felt his breath leaving him. Slowly slipping, inch by inch, he felt himself impelled toward the open door. Strive as best he could, he found himself unable to resist the joint attack of these two desperate men.

A moment later he heard the heavy clang of the door behind him. He was alone. He had proved the victim of the plan which he had



The Sergeant Seized Upon Blake.

formed. He was locked in the torture chamber of Gretzhoffen, that place of horror which he had reserved for his enemy. He had failed. He had lost all—all! He had been the cause, perhaps, of the ruin of his country!

CHAPTER XLIX.

Le Roi S'Amuse.

It was not often in his muddled life that Michael had so full warrant to give rein to his impulses. He had not noted the absence of Sachio or Ladislav. After a time, his attendants, hesitating, told him that a woman was waiting to be admitted. Her name was one which came to his brain now above all others.

"Admit her at once, yes—why do you delay?"

She came before him now, pale, downcast, almost trembling. Heavy enough had been the burden of anxiety she long had carried. She had come to the king, but she sought not this weak king's comforting. No, she had come hither in search of the man on whom even the king must rely.

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"Unimportant! Do not say that word. Unimportant—when all we have thought of was yourself. What has kept you away?—though I am sure you came as soon as you could."

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The Advancing Hosts of Grahoffen Were Met by a Sleet of Missiles.

ago, an extra bottle of Beloc, and my majesty sent a man, Count Sachio, yonder to bring it. My majesty desires—"

"Sachio here!"

"Yes, here. You have said that twice. He was here, twice or once—I know not how many times. But now you are here, mademoiselle, and that is enough. My majesty desires—"

He advanced toward her. The leer upon his puffed face gave her swift disgust as well as terror. With no purpose whatever, as he stumbled forward she fled from the room, fled she knew not where.

Without much plan, Kitty turned toward the interior of the palace, and down the long hall which before that time she had explored. Something told her that Frederick, if he were here in the palace now, had passed that way.

The torture chamber—that dread spot! Must she go there to look for him? She sped on rapidly along these passageways which she had learned before. Through the last deep sunken tunnel which led to the door of the torture chamber itself she passed alone, trembling with fear, and yet resolved.

The door was locked. She turned to see the key upon the wall. As she turned there came to her a faint sound. Someone was knocking at the door. The blood stopped at her heart. Had the dead indeed come to life? Was it indeed true that some hand from beyond the grave alone could point out the hiding place of this treasure? What could it mean?

But the knocking at the door grew bolder. She heard a voice—a faint voice through the steel facing of the inner cavern. Trembling, she fitted the key, gave one great push to open the door, which yielded the more quickly to a power exerted within. She saw the faint gleam of a light added to those of her own candle; saw the face of the man she had sought!

"You?" she cried. "It is you?"

She heard him answer calmly, slowly, without agitation, as though all the time he had been convinced she would come.

"It is ended," said Count Frederick at last, slowly. "Never again will I doubt! I prayed for you, prayed that you should understand before I died. But it was meant for you to come for me, that I might know—know as much as they who are here, who have been my fellows and my friends. Mademoiselle—I had said good-by to everything excepting one. There was that left which no man should die without knowing—that experience which only makes life worth living. I have dreaded all things, but now I hope. I must—I shall hope!"

He stooped toward her now, and for the moment each was careless of the strange surroundings in which they stood. For a half moment the heart of Kitty Gray was on the point of surrender.

"Monsieur le comte, for that we have no time now," said she gently. "It was but chance which brought me here."

"Chance? Yes, if fate, if the hand of heaven mean chance, I shall call it chance, not otherwise. I say that it was the plan of fate long ago that you should come to me, now and here."

"We have come close to the secret," said Kitty Gray slowly. "But we have come closer to perils."

"True, more than you know."

"What do you mean?"

"Sachio was here—it was he and his man who thrust me in here, where I had planned to place him. They know it all—all that we do now, mademoiselle. Sachio himself has gone to carry his news to his king. We are undone, mademoiselle! There will be war."

"If war, then why do we wait here?" she demanded of him. "War is what we have sought to avoid for this kingdom by our own knowledge of the coin. If it be too late—why, then, we must fight. Ah, how I wish I were a man, that I might fight as well!"

"You have fought well for all of us, mademoiselle," said Frederick. "We have repulsed our enemies. Would you repulse—your friend?"

She made no answer, but was away before him in the dark passageway.

CHAPTER L.

The Battle.

Sachio and Ladislav, as may be guessed, allowed no grass to grow under their feet as they hastened toward

their own kingdom, leaving behind them the befuddled monarch who had no idea that he had entertained such vipers.

They never reached the confines of Grahoffen kingdom; instead they met the army of Cortislav already afield and well across the neutral lands.

"Look!" cried Sachio. "Cortislav is afoot! By the Lord! Yonder comes a real king!"

It was even so. Soon they were among the advance guards, the skirmishers of the main force, which were advancing. In time they were brought to the bodyguard of the king himself, for Cortislav marched with his men, after the fashion of monarchs of old. He had put all his fortunes to the test that day.

"What! Sachio," he said, as he grimly regarded that nobleman. "You have failed again?"

"No, your majesty, I have not failed. I bring you success, at last."

He opened the palm which he raised before the eyes of his king. In it lay the broken half of the Gretzhoffen coin.

"The coin!—by our lady! It is ours! Bring it to me closer. Give it to me! Let me see it!"

"The secret is ours!" said he. "The torture chamber—the treasure!"

"It lies in the northeast corner of the palace, deep under the walls," said Sachio. "Come, let us march steadily, toward the unsuspecting city of Gretzhoffen, governed by an addled king too far gone in his cups to suspect danger of any sort—a king never strong, and now weaker than his wont at a time when all the forces of a real king were needed."

They met no resistance at the walls of Gretzhoffen itself. The armies of King Michael were not in evidence. The people of Gretzhoffen ran this way and that, leaderless. "Where are our forces?" they demanded. "Where is the army? Where is the king? Where is Count Frederick?"

To these demands came no present answer. The forces of the enemy advanced along the avenues.

"Yonder it lies, your majesty," said Count Sachio, pointing to the castle which they approached. "Deep beneath the walls yonder, in the northeast corner, my eyes saw the torture chamber of Gretzhoffen."

"Did you find the treasure?" demanded Cortislav.

"No, your majesty, that was exploration fit for your majesty's hands alone. I did not search for it. Rather, I hastened to bring your majesty here in your own person."

"We soon shall know," said Cortislav, and signaled the advance.

The sound of hoofs and trampling feet filled the streets of Gretzhoffen. The army of Gretzhoffen, in close formation, marched forward under the summons of the bugles. Quickly passing down the main avenue which led to the palace, they spread out by columns right and left, covering the full front of that edifice, which lay before them hidden in its screen of shrubbery.

"Look, your majesty," said Sachio, and pointed.

Through a little break in the screening wall of green he saw the plume of a horseman, who sat motionless as though waiting.

"One of your guards!" exclaimed Cortislav. "Go take him. Stop for nothing. Press on into the palace itself."

The front ranks broke forward, each eager to be the first to take captive the foe man thus discovered.

Not one man, but many hundreds, met their coming—the forces of Gretzhoffen in ambush. In the first front the picked men of the guard had been stationed under the screening shrubbery by the actual commander in chief of the Gretzhoffen forces that day—none less than Count Frederick himself.

In such brief time as had been allowed him, he had made his arrangements and posted his forces in what he conceived to be the only feasible strategy. Now the jaws were sprung. Whether trap or victim should prove the stronger was later to be known.

The bugles of Gretzhoffen, high and clear, sounded the counter-charge. The advancing forces of Grahoffen were met full in the face by a level sleet of missiles, and from their covering the forces of Gretzhoffen sprang out, section after section. Face to face, line against line, the two detachments met in the shock of arms.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



He Heard the Deep Voice of Sachio.

Frederick in turn found his own errand done. These two likewise turned toward the Hotel de Ville.

"Monsieur le prefect," announced the servant, when at last they had reached the presence of that official, "this man"—pointing to Blake—"fired on this other man and tried to kill him. That is what I do not understand."

The sound of the entrance of others at the office now attracted their attention.

"Your excellency," announced the sergeant, "these others, the young American—Count Frederick—"

The prefect turned his gaze upon the new arrivals, himself none too well pleased. He found them but com-

"And his excellency, le Comte Frederick."

"Well, yes, himself as well, then. Nor am I sorry that is true. I fancy perhaps I may have been unjust to him. He has done much, after all, for me, his enemy."

"What, you, his enemy?" grinned Roleau. "Not in the least. Au contraire, mademoiselle!"

"Tais-toi!" exclaimed Kitty, her color rising once more.

CHAPTER XLVII.

To Arms.

Dispersed under the wrath of their savage sovereign, the courtiers of Grahoffen were cudgeling their wits to