

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.

SEVENTEENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER LX.

The Plotters of Grahoffen.

In the court of Grahoffen, meantime, mixed sensations occupied the minds of those responsible for the disappearance of Kitty Gray and her servant, Roleau. Old Cortislaw and his redoubtable aid, Count Sachio, foregathered in the palace rooms immediately following the acts which had meant the forced deportation.

"She has gone, then, Sachio?" demanded the king.

"Without a doubt, your majesty! I myself from a distance saw the two hoisted inboard in freight nets—as so many cattle. They went into the hold of the vessel beyond any question—whether or not they come out again is their concern, not ours!"

"I am not so sure," said the old king thoughtfully, "not so sure. True, we have rid ourselves of potential trouble, but at the same time we have deprived ourselves of potential aid in questions not yet solved. They might have been useful, perhaps—"

"You mean the girl?"

"Yes. She has a mind, be sure of that. But what she might have done of use to us we may no longer ask with profit—she now is beyond our recall. That is only as to her knowledge, whatever it may have been, of the broken coin. As to this other enigma, this scrap of paper, which may or may not be connected therewith—who knows? I declare, I am like a horse in the dark—ready to shy at any such trifle as a scrap of paper blowing on the wind."

"We still have it, your majesty—we took it from her."

"Yes, but when we separate the two—the scrap of paper and the scrap of a girl—what do we actually accomplish? We have only a larger secret left, a deeper mystery. Curses on all women, anyhow! They only make us trouble. Mysterious themselves, they solve no mysteries. The best I hope for yonder traveler is that she sinks at sea. I swear, sometimes our little kingdom bids fair to sink in its own waves of trouble."

"Well, now, your majesty," said Sachio, who disliked this discontent of his sovereign, at no time safe for any courtier, "let us see what we ourselves may be able to do in solution of this mystery which has been bequeathed us. Surely our minds are as good as those of a rattle-brained girl from America."

"Hum—it may be true. What do you propose, at least?"

"Why, your majesty, that is obvious. What we must do is to get into our hands the other half of this scrap of paper. It lies still somewhere over in Gretzhoffen, along with the other half of the Gretzhoffen coin."

"Yes, along with the missing half of that coin, also? They hold the key, or half of it, that is true. And yet we hold as much as they—half of the answer. Each is complement of the other. That is to say, a stalemate, a drawn game—there is never profit in any such."

"Stay, your majesty, let us see further before we call the game done. Surely our chances outweigh theirs, for we have a monarch to guide us who has brains and courage. I count myself, also, as worth an equal balance with Count Frederick, their strongest man. And how shall we estimate yonder drunken, worthless, puppet king of theirs—how shall he stand in comparison with ours?"

Sachio bowed deeply. His flattery was not without its effect on the old king, who smiled his approval.

"My dear Sachio, whenever I need comfort you have it at hand!" exclaimed he. "Well, then, what further may we plan against them? How may we loose their hold upon these secrets which perplex and menace us so much?"

"Why, this: That we profess a new and profound friendship for Michael. He will be but too glad to listen to our proposition, be sure of that."

"Suppose we may be assured of that—what then?"

"He would be willing to do us some little favor if it caused him but little trouble to grant it. He looks on us as defeated. Let us encourage him to play the role of the grand Caesar, able to be gracious, to be magnanimous, to a fallen foe."

"Good—go on—I see the point."

"So we ask of that weak mind something which his mere sloth will dispose him to grant us—nothing much—only the ownership of a worthless bit of paper. He does not know its value—perhaps he does not know of its existence."

"But if he knows nothing whatever of that scrap of paper—if he never heard of it—"

"All the more he will be willing to part with it if we ourselves can find it. As to that, we do not know. This is but a drag-net sort of move on our part, but it may take some fish—who knows?"

"Good! Then what is our next move, as you perceive it?"

"Why, let us make a cautious move to feel out their point—as a fencer tests his adversary's wrist, to feel his strength at the hilt. Let us send a note of friendship to Michael and ask him if it be not better that these two little kingdoms, separated by so narrow a stretch of land, should not henceforth meet in harmony, and no longer join in armed encounters. Let us point out to him that there are other nations greater than either of us—or both of us—which perhaps some time may look our way. Let us show him the virtue of an alliance between these two kingdoms. Let us play upon his fears, his vanity, his weakness, until we have convinced him that friendship with us is a thing desirable for him. Let us ask good Michael if he is not graciously disposed to be our friend today—to be our magnanimous and powerful friend!"

Sachio grinned broadly at his own irony, and his monarch gave vent to a loud laugh, his gray beard curling at the thought of his courtier's cunning as well as his loyalty to his own king.

"Excellent! Sachio, excellent!" he exclaimed. "Nor do I doubt the success of this thing as you plan it, if you yourself shall carry it forward. Do you then write that humblemissive that you suggest—do you yourself ask Michael to be graciously generous to a weak and pleading friend! Ha! ha! Sachio, what next lies on the board for us?"

"Why, then, your majesty, we are alongside the fence that lies between us. We do not know how far it may be until we come to a gate or a gap, but sometimes there will be a gate or a gap, through which we may pass. In some way I doubt not, I and others may perhaps gain access to the palace of Gretzhoffen. That gives us our footing. As for them, they sleep and revel. As for us, we act. It is the man of action who succeeds. Let them dream—we will act."

"Your counsels jump with my own, my dear Sachio," said Cortislaw. "I have small use for the man who dreams or the man who waits. It shall be as you say. A test of this at least cannot harm us, and may prove of extreme value. Go forward with it then, as you have said."

CHAPTER LXI.

The Discovery.

The two kingdoms now hung on the fate of two refugees, two castaways, themselves forlorn and hopeless. Even as Grahoffen's king and its leading man of affairs pondered the absence of these two, so likewise the kingdom of Gretzhoffen was concerned in their absence, in their welfare, in their future, in their return.

Count Frederick stood on the deck of the Prinz Adler liner and fronted the captain of that vessel, who was severe in his resentment of the liberties he deemed to have been taken with himself and his ship.

"I tell you," said he, "I have nothing to do with your little war here. I am neutral—I am a carrier in the open trade of the open sea. My government will demand reparation for this insult to our flag."

"Sir," said Count Frederick, "your government be damned! I will take my chances with your government. Of what use will your government be to you if we blow your ship out of the water?"

"You threaten me, then?"

"No, I do not deal in threats. I tell you that I know the persons whom I mentioned are on this ship. I mean to take them off."

"And I tell you again that there are no such passengers on my ship. The ship's lists show all who have sailed with us. You may look for yourself—examine our books all you like. Do you take us for pirates—are we beyond all responsibilities?"

"I do not call you pirates," said Count Frederick, calmly. "I only call you dupes. I believe you have been deceived. You are not in possession of all the facts. My own men have told me that these persons were to be smuggled aboard the ship."

"Heiliger Gott!" roused the captain. "What is this that has been undertaken here? I never discovered it. Who and what are these persons—if there be indeed any such aboard?"

"Two, as I said. One is a man of small rank, no more than a faithful servant, powerful and resourceful himself, once loyal in my own service, now loyal in that of my mistress."

"And she—the other?"

"Yes, a young American of youth and much beauty. She was in this country on business of her own. Without plan she became involved in affairs between these two monarchs. She has been the victim of evil fortune, not through fault of her own. Now, I am telling you the truth—since I have gained my purpose of an audience with you. You may rely upon what I have said, captain. This is the truth, so far as I know it."

"Then why not let them sail for their own country—if she has been injured here why not let her go back to her own country? I am booked for New York. If that be a city of her native land, why not that port as well as any other? And how shall I know your own motives?"

Count Frederick paused in thought at this. "True—that is true," said he. "Very well, we will search your ship. When we find the young woman let her decide what she wishes to do. If she says she wishes to go back to her home, I will not prevent it. But if she be asked to go back against her will, then I shall take her with me, no matter at what cost. At least she should have the choice of decision—she should not be stowed aboard like a dumb beast with no volition of her own."

"We are quite at one as to that," assented the captain. "Good, we will search the ship—I am convinced we shall not find these persons in any of the cabins."

"Stay," he added an instant later. "I recall that a short time back there was complaint of noises below decks! I sent some men to look into that. Where are they?"

He pressed a bell and soon one of his assistant officers came.

"Go, bring me the men I sent to examine the cargo a while ago. There was some talk of a noise as of loose animals in the hold."

After a time the officer returned, pushing before him two seamen. They were the same who had been dispatched on the errand mentioned. But

"Captain—quick!" he exclaimed. "There is trouble with the engines."

"What's wrong?" inquired the ship's master.

"The right-hand tubular has gone bad," exclaimed the engineer. "She has been pounding like a million hammers. The water is low, and the intake's clogged. Something's wrong—I cannot tell what. We have tried to shut her off and can't. The boiler may go at any minute."

"Explode?" inquired the captain calmly.

The engineer could only nod.

"Stay," called Frederick at this juncture. "Let the engineer go back to his work. Let us first find the helpless persons below. If danger impend let us bring them up to have their chance for safety."

The captain, a gallant man withal, turned to him and nodded grimly. "Go back to your post, Miller," he said to the engineer. "We will join you presently."

He himself led the way to the lift which led to the lower decks and the hatchway which covered the ladders into the ship's hold.

They found themselves at last deep in the bowels of the vessel, among the bales and casks of the cargo, where for a time all was darkness and mystery. But as they hurried here and there, commanding the guidance of the two recreant seamen and casting the rays of their lights hither and yon, at last they saw a trussed-up bundle behind a bale of goods which seemed to have some human semblance. It was Roleau. Frederick himself was first at his side. He bent over him, freed him, and after a time revived him.

"Monsieur—your excellency!" said he at length. "It is you."

"Where is she?" demanded Frederick. "Was she here?"

"I have known nothing for some time, it seems. Yet she was here, yes—she is gone, I know not where."

Frederick left him to continue his

numerous cries of those in mortal terror.

Obedient to their orders for a time, the crew held to their posts. The boats were lowered one after another. Yet into each there piled a senseless mass of packed humanity, overcrowding and rendering it useless as it reached the surface of the sea.

Children and women and strong men fought now for a place in the last of the boats. Discipline broke and failed. What had been a happy party of travelers was now a disorganized mob.

His arms supporting Kitty on one side, those of Roleau on the other, Count Frederick did his best to reach the raft. Useless, hopeless! They were forced back time and again.

"Jump!" cried Frederick at last. "Jump! We will swim for it. We must take the last chance."

The look on the face of the girl at this side was one in part of despair, but more of trust. Unhesitatingly the three sprang together.

The sea closed over them. They rose after an agonized instant which seemed death itself—rose but to see the giant ship which had carried them raise her bows aloft, shiver and tremble, and slowly slide back and down beneath the waves. In the whirlpool which marked the spot they were but little human units, floating as best they might among scores and hundreds of others.

"This way!" cried Frederick, and he and Roleau aided Kitty to a floating piece of wreckage. But others saw it also. Time and again they were fought back from it as others stronger or more remorseless claimed it as their own.

In all this commotion of shouting and struggling men, of wailing women, of flailing arms and beating fists, Frederick and Roleau lost sight of Kitty at last—she had gone, they knew not where, in that chaos of the sea.

"Where is she?" demanded Frederick weakly, himself well-nigh spent. "Which way?"

"I know not," gasped Roleau, himself in as bad case as the other. "I cannot tell, but fear that she is gone."

They swam about for a time in search, but could not make out the whereabouts of her whom they sought; then they hoisted themselves one on each side of a floating spar and rested.

"Allow me, excellency," said Roleau, and flung across the end of his belt. "Let us lash fast. I cannot hold much longer."

Spent and hopeless, they rested as they might and allowed fate to have its way with them.

"Our boat—the yacht, excellency," exclaimed Roleau at length. "Where is she—the vessel which brought you out?"

Frederick could only shake his head. "Gone," said he. "I doubt not she was scuttled by the heavy ironwork blown out by the explosion. There is no hope."

CHAPTER LXII.

Marooned.

The vessel when blown up was well on her way with the favoring winds which she sought, which in ordinary course would have carried her out into the Mediterranean.

How Count Frederick and Roleau lived they scarcely knew. Happily the water at that latitude was not cold, and the day was one of calm.

"Roleau, she has perished!" murmured Count Frederick. "She is gone. Let me, too, perish then, for I have never been able to say that which I should have said. I have had no opportunity to expiate many things which I have done."

"As well die now as any time," said Roleau.

Wind and wave carried these two far—they knew not how far, and had no means of guessing, for they could not tell how long a time had passed since the explosion which had sunk the ship. They knew not which way to look for land, if land there might be. It was by mere chance that at one moment, as they flung high on the crest of the wave, Count Frederick saw, many hours after the wrecking of the ship, something which caused him to give an exclamation of surprise.

"Roleau," he exclaimed. "There is land ahead, I believe!"

"Look!" said Count Frederick at length. "They are coming out to us."

Surely enough, even from where they were they could see dark forms running here and there, could see the launching of a boat, could see it coming on, rising and falling on the waves.

At length the craft came alongside, manned by strange, swarthy natives, whose speech they did not know, yet who seemed friendly enough withal to serve as rescuers for them. With small ceremony they were hauled on board, and the boat, turning, made way back again to the shore ahead.

"'Tis an island, Roleau," said Frederick, after a moment spent in examination. "Not so large, but excellent under foot, is it not true? And these people seem not unfriendly to us."

For a time they had been left alone, but now they saw certain of the natives returning with food and water. Upon these both the shipwrecked adventurers fell with eagerness. Their captors stood about and grinned in pleasure. All the wealth of Count Frederick, his gold, his castles, his lands—these things seemed little in value as compared to what these swarthy natives brought him now.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Kitty, the Castaway.

If Count Frederick and Roleau had been dismayed when they saw Kitty Gray swept away from them in the mad struggle for safety in the sea,

what must have been her own feelings as she found herself separated from these powerful friends? Once more she found herself alone—and once more in the blind instinct for self-preservation she did what she could for her own safety.

She dared not think of the fate of her friends. She mourned them now as dead, but still in her subconscious mind kept bitterly fighting the conviction even as it came. And as she argued, she found herself swept away farther and farther from the place where last she had seen them.

In some way, she knew not how, Kitty found herself among many others upon the same considerable piece of wreckage where Roleau and Frederick had endeavored to place her soon after the explosion. Many others now clung to this. She shuddered as she cast a glance about her over the water, and drew closer to the center of the raft. One after another she saw them lose their hold; one after another she saw them carried away by the waves. As for herself, preserved miraculously, she knew not how, she fastened herself as best she could to the frail floating floor and ceased to struggle. Mercifully her senses left her for a time.

When she came once more slowly and painfully to a realizing sense of what had befallen, she looked about her wearily.

She was alone upon the sea. Of those who had been about her, none now survived! Not far from her a body or two floated, but not a living being was to be seen, not a survivor save herself had found this means of safety.

There was no food. There was no fresh water for her. There was no means of raising a sail, or using an oar, even of hoisting a signal had she had one. And yet the sky above her was so blue and gentle, the sea around her so kind, that all now seemed less terrible than it had been but now. Hungry and thirsty as she was she shuddered as she thought of the added pangs that might be hers. She called aloud in her distress, her despair. There came no answer, save in the shrieks of the circling birds which hovered, ghostlike, above her.

The waves bore her onward, she knew not where, and cared not how, for how many hours she could not tell. Face to face with herself, her past, her future, the unhappy girl passed a period of unknown duration, engaged in her own reflections.

It was not her own life she feared to lose, so she said, for life after all was a little thing, a temporary passage at best. But if only she might have lived now for the sake of that which she felt in her own heart—for the sake of that uncompleted period of her own life whose dawn she acknowledged to have seen but now!

He was gone! She had seen him swept away before her very eyes. He was her enemy, who had so often taunted her and defied her, who had fought her in every contest of wits—yet in turn he had aided her to escape and saved her but now—instead of enemy he had turned into friend or more than friend—and he was gone. The sunset of her day came even with its dawn.

"Yes," she said to herself, "he saved me at the cost of his own life." And the life of that other faithful friend, Roleau, the dauntless, it, too, had been wasted to save her own—the life she now could hold but worthless, since it must be lived alone. They were dead—and she had been the cause of that! What could life hold further for her?

Kitty Gray bent her head down upon her knees. Her hair fell about her face. And thus she sat, she knew not how long, resigning herself to her fate, making her peace with what she felt now must come. "Now," said she, "let me die!" And when once more the sleep of exhaustion came upon her she thought it that of death itself.

She awakened, none the less, in time—for strong indeed are the ties that bind us whether or not we like to this life into which we are born without our asking. She awakened and stared with hollow eyes about her at a world which she neither knew nor loved. But even so, at length her gaze found something to cause her eyes to kindle, her breath to come a trifle faster.

Far in the distance she had caught sight of the shore of distant land—the same sight which in turn had met the gaze of that friend whom now she mourned. It lay there low on the sea and distant—land, some sort of land, she knew not what.

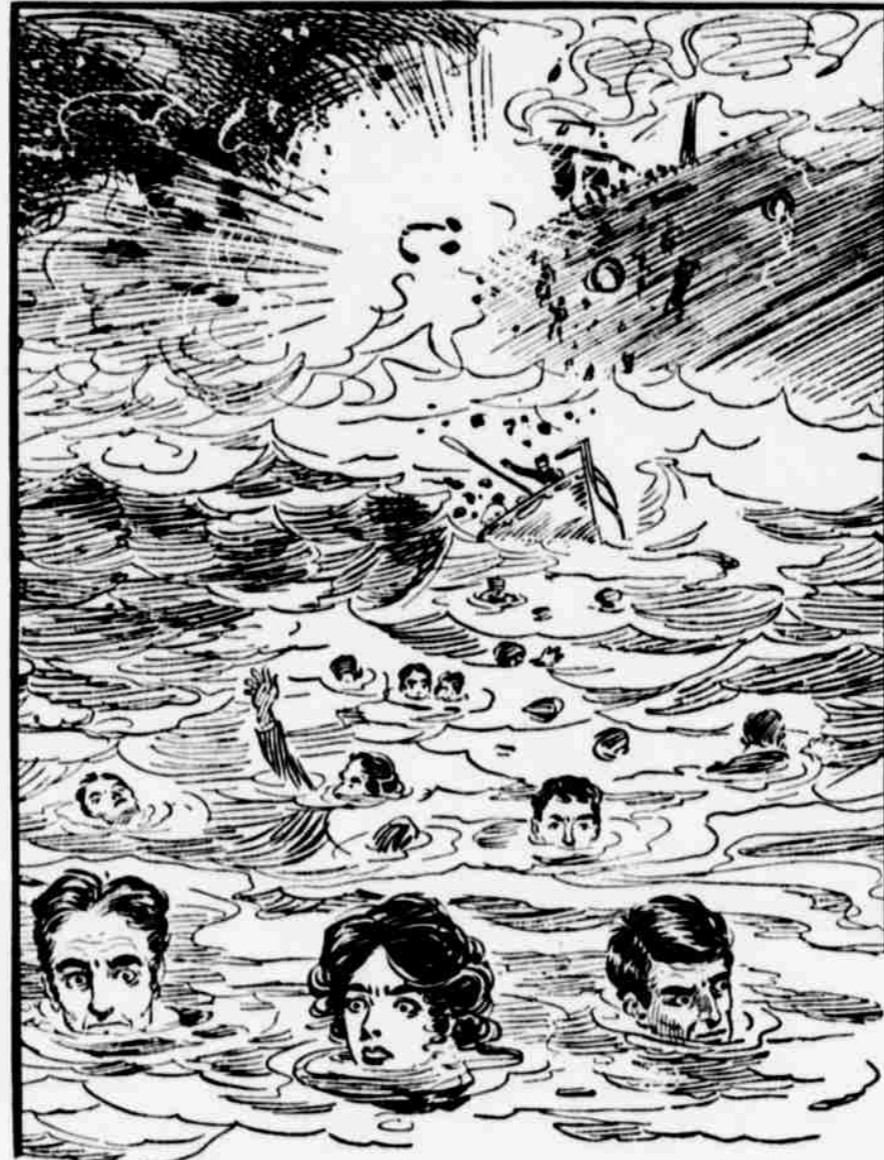
She looked at it dully, apathetically. In truth, she was too far gone to care. Whether or not she retained consciousness through the remainder of her voyage, she herself could never tell.

At length, a weak and unimportant bit of flotsam of the sea, Kitty Gray was cast up upon the shore, rejected by that sea but now so eager to claim her as its own. Yes, by some miracle, she dared not ask what, she had been spared. This at least was land. If death must come, it was not now to be death through peril of the sea. Wearily she lifted herself from her bed upon the sand, raised herself upon an elbow to look about her.

What she saw gave her no great delight. Rather, had she had strength left for terror, she had known additional terror now.

Approaching from a distance were certain figures, inhabitants of this land, whose look she could not recognize, whose language she could not understand. They approached, shouting, gesticulating. They were armed, and they advanced upon her menacingly.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



They Rose After an Agonizing Instant Which Seemed Death Itself.

they were not now as they had been then. Both bore marks of conflict, and of conflict which had not gone altogether to their favor.

"How, now, you dogs?" cried the captain. "What's wrong with you? Have you been fighting among yourselves?"

One, quicker witted than the other, gave his assent to this at once. The second was not so fortunate.

"'Twas the animals," said he, with cunning not quite equal to the issue.

"What? You disagree, then?" said the captain. "What does this mean, fellows? Animals? What animals? Lions?—tigers?—I did not know we carried such!"

The sailor hung his head, and the captain's suspicions grew.

"You are covering up something here. Speak, you ruffians, and speak the truth."

"Captain," began the man once more, "we are innocent. But we found two stowaways below, and thinking to bring them up, they fell upon us and beat us—a man and a woman."

"How did they get aboard—where are they then—who are they?"

"They must have come in with the freight by the lift from the dock, captain. The young woman—she is beautiful—and as you say, she is like a tiger. As to the man, yes, he was like a lion. They fought us, you see."

"Where are they now, spitzbuben, ruffians?"

The speaker paled suddenly. "They are there in the hold," he said. "Lead us to them then."

They turned to find their way to the lower portions of the ship, but even as they did so they met an interruption. An agitated man, grimy and dirty, in oil-stained clothing, came running towards the captain's room—none less than the chief engineer of the vessel, who obviously had been engaged in commoner duties than naturally belonged to him.

buried search in the confused freightage of the ship's hold. At last he found that which he sought.

She tried feebly to raise herself as she heard footsteps, heard a voice she knew to be that of her friend.

"Mademoiselle—thank God!" was all Count Frederick could say.

"It is you, then?" was her reply. "What has happened? Why are you here?"

"I am here, my dear mademoiselle, in the justice of the immortal gods—to save you—to care for you. I heard of the plot against you. My own boat lies alongside—I have come. I am here to take you from this ship, if so you wish. Come then, let us hasten. There is scant time."

They all crowded now to the ladders up from the hold, and rapidly as they might, found their way back to the upper deck. There came confusion, noise, trampling, shouts, sounds not ordinary at this stage of the voyage of a vessel putting out to sea. The passengers themselves suspected something to be wrong. They crowded now about the captain excitedly, expostulating. The master of the ship pushed them aside.

"Well, Miller," he demanded again of the oil-stained engineer who hurried up, "what is it?"

"It may be a minute, sir—or less!"

In an instant they were face to face with the ultimate peril of the seas—fire, explosion on shipboard.

There came from below that sound which had been expected, dreaded—a muffled, heavy roar, comparable to nothing in the world in terrifying quality at such a time as this. The ship so lately safe and strong beneath them all, now trembled. Midway her decks rose, spread apart, fell. A cloud of blinding white steam rolled from the engine rooms, stifling and scalding all within its way. Cries of anguish came from below decks, cries of despair. To these were added now the far more