

The Broken Coin

By EMERSON HOUGH

From the Scenario by Grace Cunard

A Story of Mystery and Adventure

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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.

INSTALLMENT SIX

CHAPTER XXI.

In the Underworld.

Whichever way she turned, escape seemed quite cut off for the young woman, whose adventures now had carried her into such desperate case. Behind her still rose the sounds of combat, where Roleau and Landozzi fought with the occupants who remained in the thieves' den. On ahead, in the passageway, others of the gang swarmed in, cutting off exit by the main gallery. And here, holding her as his prisoner, was the man she feared most of them all, as the most apt to win in this contest for the possession of the coin—Frederick, the nobleman of Gretzhoffen, whose resolution matched her own.

She beat at him with her hands as he swung her lightly from the ground, but he only smiled at her protests—only smiled when he saw himself outnumbered by these newcomers who confronted them in the main exit. At bay, he stood beside his captive and waited those who sought to make them both captives.

Roleau and Landozzi, seeing that Kitty had escaped, glared at one another for a moment before they understood that they both were her friends. From what they heard they knew that she still was besieged in the main entry way. A moment later Roleau forced his way out the rear entry of the den, closely followed by Landozzi, as agile as himself. They armed themselves at the car which had brought them hither, and sprang forward to the entrance of the main gallery, eager to assist the woman whom they both sought to serve.

This flanking attack upon the enemy was more than offset by the march in the rear of the main enemy himself—Blake, the renegade, who, finding himself freed of his assailants, sprang into the passageway after Kitty. She, as he knew very well, was in possession of the coin. He found her there in the company of a stranger—a tall man whom he never before had seen, and who now showed small fear of himself or of the others confronting him. There was no time for Blake to figure upon what relation these two might have—the coin was all he cared for.

"Give it to me!" he demanded as he sprang at Kitty with a raised weapon.

Count Frederick stepped toward him. "Fellow, what is it that you want? Leave this young lady alone." "He has it! Search him!" exclaimed Kitty quickly, pointing to Frederick himself. That individual experienced a swift surprise at this sudden turning of the tables upon him. But the ruse worked—unceremoniously the apaches laid hands upon Count Frederick and haled him back to the rear of the subterranean passageway. Believing that he had taken the coin from Kitty, they set her advice into vigorous effect at once.

A pair of thieves still guarded the exit, but these now were to meet the escaped Roleau and his confederate, as keen for conflict as they, and better prepared for it. Kitty heard rapid shots, the acrid smell of powder filled the place. Then, before she had further time for thought, she felt herself hurried forward, the strong hand of Roleau upon her arm.

"Quick, excellency," he called, "there is yet time."

As she felt the cool air of the outer world upon her cheek Kitty shook off a trace of her despair. The coin still was in her hand—she might yet escape.

Cut off by some of the apaches from the car toward which they sprang, Roleau turned and hurried Kitty to the two horses which had brought Landozzi and herself thither. An instant later they were mounted and fleeing, leaving Landozzi to fend for himself, as they well knew he could. What interested them more was the cries of the two ruffians who themselves had sprung to the car and now were cranking it furiously with the intent of pursuing them in their own motor.

Within the den where these things had occurred Frederick, count of Gretzhoffen, now was prisoner to the rat-faced leader of the apaches, the renegade Blake. The latter stood menacing him.

"Why be agitated, my friend?" demanded the nobleman, coolly enough. "You see I have not the coin. The girl has outwitted you—myself as well. I swear, her wit is nimble enough! She has left me—and you—in the lurch, and has escaped once more. She has flung me to you, as Russian travelers sometimes fling

something to stop the wolves which pursue them. While you are reading me she gains time! But why read me? If I had the coin I would give it to you now, for I fancy a whole throat more than I do a divided coin. But you see I haven't it."

"Very well, monsieur," said the renegade leader, "I am forced to believe what you say—the coin is gone, no one knows where by now. But you yourself shall remain here until my men bring back those two—the girl and the ruffian who used us so hard in her defense. Landozzi—he is safe enough. We do not fear him, for in a way he is our brother. But tell me, monsieur, what is it—this coin? Why do so many pursue it?"

"He turned a keen eye upon the nobleman who remained so composed in these surroundings. "Why, I may tell you but little," answered Count Frederick. "If I had it in my hand now perhaps I could tell you more. But always no sooner do I place a hand upon it than yonder young woman appears out of nowhere and makes away with it again! I have resolved to have it—I admit that. As you know, monsieur, one does not readily give up resolutions of that nature, when formed. Is it not so?"

"Frankly, I own a like desire," rejoined Blake. "I will win any man will bring her back."

"I am not so sure. I find her most active in her ways."

"Who is she then?—and what is she to you, monsieur?" demanded Blake.

Count Frederick paused for half an instant, as though himself engaged in thought.

"Monsieur," said he, "you ask me a question there indeed! I have not yet myself decided upon that answer. Who is she? She is an American—that is almost all I know of her. She may or may not be of quality in her own land, but she has some desperate errand here in ours."

"With such beauty as hers," said the apache leader, "rank matters but little."

"Stop!" exclaimed Count Frederick. "It is not for you to comment in that way!" The blood surged into the nobleman's face as he spoke.

"Why? What is it to you?" The covert sneer on the face of the other showed his own suspicions as to which way the wind might set regarding these two.

"It is no matter what it is to me—nay, I do not know in truth what it is to me," said Count Frederick, irritated almost beyond speech. "She is, as I have said, an American—she has some business here—I know little more."

"And you did not answer my main question—What is she to you?"

The nobleman turned on him angrily, in loathing of such familiarity on his part. "If I could answer that question, fellow," said he, "I would not. Since I am not able to do so, I shall not."

"Monsieur admires that jeune fille!" The sneer of the renegade once more was evident.

"Yes!" Frederick turned full upon him now. "Monsieur admires her!"

CHAPTER XXII.

The Plunge.

Roleau and Kitty learned soon enough that in a race of the best of horses against a good motor car the former has small chance. They heard the clug of the motor coming swiftly on. In turn those in the car could hear the hoof-falls of the fleeing horses. The fugitives had hurried to the rough country at the edge of the desert, but guided by a reckless driver the speeding car clung close to them.

A sudden exclamation from Roleau came back to her after a time. He pulled his horse up strongly, and she herself reined in just in time. Ahead of them lay the brink of a sheer drop of unknown depth.

"Pull off!" cried Roleau. "Get to one side and let them come—let them come on!"

She swerved quickly aside just in time, and pulled up at the brink. There she was the witness of a sudden tragedy.

The men in the car, their eyes fixed only on the two whom they pursued, did not see the brink of the bank in time. Throttle wide open, they came on at speed. Too late they realized what was ahead. The car sped out into space—how far, neither of its occupants ever had time to know.

Roleau's horse dropped into running water as boldly he sprang into ahead of the car. Saved by his horse, he swam it to the bank. Not so fortunate those in the car. The vehicle turned over even as it fell, and dropped—a drop of many feet, plunging them under it beneath the surface of the stream. They were lost hopelessly, for had the car not crushed them they must at once have drowned, thus imprisoned.

Kitty, trembling at what she saw, re-

mained as though paralyzed by the scene.

"Which way, excellency?" panted Roleau, riding alongside.

"Into the city," cried Kitty, "fast as we can! I will be safer at the hotel."

And so, an hour later, she gave the management of the Ritz yet more cause for wonder, when, in the early hours of the morning, bedraggled, disheveled, pale, she and her unprepossessing attendant pulled up once more in the street in front of the door. In her own room, after a certain time devoted to her toilet, which left her more at peace with herself, Kitty sat for a time pondering. Yes, she once more had half the coin—that half given to her by the king. So far, so good. But after all, she was as far from the ultimate success of her errand as ever she had been. Her own half of the coin—that which she had brought with her from America—where was it? In the possession of a certain, tall, strong man—a man who had smiled when dangers threatened him—a man she hated with all her soul, as she now persuaded herself. She ought to hate him with all her heart—yes, she was sure of that. Where was he now? At least she had evened matters with him. Once he had left her helpless in the desert—now in turn she had left him the prisoner of ruthless men. Perhaps he never again would see the light of day—his life even now might be forfeit, for all she knew. If so, she would have been the cause of all that.

"They may kill him," said Kitty to herself. "I could not endure the thought of that—it would be my own fault. I will not admit that it was his fault. I was used so cruelly by his man. He himself has laid no hand on me until this very night—and then not in rudeness. Indeed, for all I know, had he not come when he did, I myself might have paid the forfeit he may be paying now."

Kitty paused for a time to look at her own face in the glass. It was very pale, very unhappy.

"I must set him free!" said she with sudden resolve to herself. "There has been life enough lost over this already—his must not be added. I will help to get him free."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Count Sachio and His Friends.

Far across the neutral lands, beyond the desert of Intergraffen, in his hunting lodge at the edge of the forest, Count Sachio for long hours of uncertainty had nursed his own wrath and disappointment at the denouement of the scenes which he had seen take place about him. Pacing up and down, refusing food or drink, his rage always turned toward the unhappy agent Rudolph, his unsuccessful messenger.

"You, Rudolph of Gretzhoffen," he exclaimed at last, "you should have died rather than betray me! Ah, you betrayed our country as well!"

The man addressed, now practically a prisoner, and if not an object of suspicion at least one of hostility, sat moody and unhappy in the main room of the lodge.

"I can say no more, excellency," said he. "I failed, it is true. But you do not count the skill and power of those who are arrayed against us?"

"How should I count them?" exclaimed Sachio, fiercely. "Why should

"Yes, and that was ended by the alliance Michael the First formed with our own prince. Love did that, messieurs—they loved our princess, so all was forgotten. He was a good king and a strong one. There is need for another strong man like him these days—but not like the second Michael of Gretzhoffen. Why, he gave away his very birthright—won by the fair face of a girl—this strange young American, whoever she may be. He gave her the Gretzhoffen coin out of hand, as though it were no more than a farthing, for all he cared—"

"But she cared, that is evidence enough!"

"Yes, she cared, that is true! and so did another care."

"Count Frederick?"

"Yes, now you have named them both," rejoined Count Sachio, his grim jaws set. "The young woman has half the coin, Count Frederick has the other half. They must both be found, and swiftly as may be. Who will ride with me? Not you, Rudolph—someone must do the errand you failed in doing. You, Johann; you, Marco—come. We must bring back not either half of the Gretzhoffen coin tonight—but both halves."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Quality of Mercy.

A two-fold mental attitude occupied Kitty as she still sat in her own apartment trying to make just estimate of her own necessities and those of another.

"If I sent to the police to rescue him," she said to herself—and now she called "him" one who lately had been her enemy—"they would only laugh at me. They do as they like these days. No one knows whose friends they are—those of the thieves or of honest people. No, it would be useless to tell them."

"I have it!" she exclaimed half aloud. "I see it now. The king is still afraid of his people—he is hid in his own palace now lest he see his shadow—and all the time he is looking for a strong man—the same who he called to his side that night of the ball—Count Frederick. Very well, King Michael wants Count Frederick—and he shall have him. That is to say, he shall know where he is. If the king retains any power in this distracted country, surely he can prevail against thieves such as these. Yes, I will write to the king."

"Your majesty," she wrote. "It may interest you to know that Count Frederick is being held a prisoner by a band of apaches, in their dive near

Sachio grumbled some response, and the other went on. "These strained times cannot hold together forever—the break will come before long. Our own monarch will not continue to endure this condition, half peace and half suspicion, that exists between the two kingdoms."

"Yes—war!" exclaimed Sachio. "But why war without success? War for plan or purpose or result—yes, we could agree to that. But curse it! man, do you not see that it all hangs on the ownership of this spirit coin? There is the issue. Without that we could gain nothing if we did go to war, not even though we won the war."

"The economy of a king may mean much, my friend," went on Sachio. "Michael, the dead king, was a business man—he saved. The economy of a people is the hope of business—the economy of a king is the hope of a people itself. There are two sorts of folk in the world—those who make mortgages and those who pay them. King Michael the Second of Gretzhoffen is one who makes mortgages, King Michael the First was one who planned to pay them. He saved the money for that purpose—he intended to leave his kingdom rich."

"But where is his hidden treasury? We know something of it—it is under the fortifications of Gretzhoffen. Our own monarch knows so much as that—but no more. He asks me to learn more definitely the location of that treasury—and what have I done? What can I do—unless at length I shall gain not one but both halves of this Gretzhoffen coin? So, is it not plain enough?"

"Thirty years ago, your excellency," rejoined his friend, "these kingdoms did fight."

"Yes, and that was ended by the alliance Michael the First formed with our own prince. Love did that, messieurs—they loved our princess, so all was forgotten. He was a good king and a strong one. There is need for another strong man like him these days—but not like the second Michael of Gretzhoffen. Why, he gave away his very birthright—won by the fair face of a girl—this strange young American, whoever she may be. He gave her the Gretzhoffen coin out of hand, as though it were no more than a farthing, for all he cared—"

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Kitty, somewhat flushed, did not press the argument. Enough for her that once more they were admitted freely to the palace—and once more passed back through the wide halls until at length they stood at the door of the sanctum sanctorum of the place's master—the little bedroom where Kitty was convinced he kept his secret of the coin.

She placed Roleau on guard in the hall while she herself went about an errand suddenly grown hateful to herself.

But though she sought here and there hurriedly in the drawers of the dresser, here and there in such places as came to her mind, she found nothing—there was no trace of the missing object.

"Roleau," she exclaimed excitedly, going to the hall, "It will take time. Keep watch. I have no idea where he can have left it."

Puzzled, she turned from one corner of the room to the other, examining the furniture, which showed a strange mixture of luxury and asceticism. Close by the head of the little iron bedstead which seemed sufficient to content the master of the place, she saw a delicate cabinet of boules.

The front of this desk was a drop leaf, which pulled out after it was



"He Has It! Search Him!" Exclaimed Kitty.

set in place by a metal hinge. Back of this, in the interior of the cabinet, below a series of little pigeonholes, stood a row of three drawers of rose-wood, all beautifully fitted.

The eye of Kitty caught these as she sat deliberately engaged in her distasteful but absorbing task. She drew out all three of these drawers and put them on the desk lid before her, examining each in turn. She wondered why she was glad to find there were no letters from any other woman—yes, here was one—but the writing was that of an old woman, she was sure. And here were certain rings, seals, trinkets, a miniature on ivory—even a tight curled ring of gray hair, silken and delicate.

She sat despondent after all her search. The half coin was not here! She had failed once more. Doubtfully at her wit's end—for now she knew not where to look further in the room—she sat gazing at the three little rosewood drawers before her.

Suddenly an idea came to her mind. She picked up one of the drawers, and stepping to the side of the cabinet, measured the depth of the drawer against that of the upper case which had contained it. It was shallower than the full depth of the desk by some three inches.

Hurriedly she stooped down in front of the desk, dropping her eyes to the level of the drawers, which in the cunning of the maker had been placed precisely where the level of the human eye would not be apt to fall. She peered back into the recess from which she had drawn the three tight-fitting drawers. Beyond them she saw three little ivory knobs.

An exclamation escaped her. Not for nothing, then, had been her own experience in antiques. She knew something of the cunning the old makers put into secret drawers and spaces in some of their furniture.

She thrust in her hand, grasped one of the tiny ivory knobs, and drew it gently toward her. It was as she had thought—there was a row of three shallow secret drawers in the back of the desk, hidden by the three larger ones which originally she had drawn out. Not one time in fifty would anyone suspect the presence of these secret compartments. The work of the old cabinetmaker was beautifully done throughout. It had been a master mind, and a cunning one, which had designed it and executed it.

A strange conviction came to Kitty that now she was at the end of her quest. Hurriedly her fingers turned over the contents of the little receptacles. One held yet another miniature—a beautiful thing—of a lady whose high and aristocratic features reminded her of some face, she could not at first tell whose. There was nothing else.

The second was also empty—just an address or so in faded yellow papers, treasured for some purpose, she knew not what and could not ask.

The last drawer was filled to the top with tissue paper which had been crushed down. Her hands half-trembling, Kitty began to unfold this tissue. All at once she paused, her eyes gleaming.

The half of the Gretzhoffen coin lay in her hands! she caught at the little silken cord about her neck, pulled to view the



Others of the Gang Cut Off Exit by the Main Gallery.

"Can I explain to my own king—can you explain to him? Bah! man, they come to nothing in life—explanations, excuses, reasons. Results, results, results—those alone count for aught."

"Excellency, I tried."

"You tried—what is that? Rather say you failed, for that is the main thing."

"But, excellency," spoke up another man after a time, a friend of Sachio, "if it is useless to cry over spilt milk—and we cannot wholly mend this pitcher—even the trifle of milk remaining in the fragments may have some value."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, this. The young girl who was the actual instrument of Rudolph's failure—as none of us can doubt—is still alive and still at liberty."

"Well, what of that?"

"If we found her—and perhaps she can be found—we could even pick up our skin at the same spot where we left it. She is somewhere on top of earth—she is not a spirit after all, elusive though she seems."



She Saw the Leveled Barrel of a Revolver Protruding.

little chamolis bag thus suspended at her corsage. From this, her hands still trembling in her haste, she brought out the king's half of the coin—that which had given her so much trouble to regain.

"They match—'tis done," exclaimed Kitty, half aloud. And indeed the broken edges of the coin fitted absolutely. Her errand was done—at last she had succeeded.

"Roleau!" she started up now. But even as she did so she stopped once more, arrested, the two halves of the coin still in her hand.

There was a little window at one side of the room, a curtained window—she had not stopped to see whether or not it was glazed. Now through the parted curtain of this little aperture she saw the leveled barrel of a revolver protruding, its aim directed at her as she stood.

"Roleau!" she called once more, and as she spoke cowered away as best she might from the weapon whose aim was full upon her.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)