

The Broken Coin

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

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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.

EIGHTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XXIX.

King Cortislaw.

"So you find it convenient to enter my room once more unasked?" Kitty's eyes flashed in genuine indignation as she faced Count Sachio.

"It is not your room, mademoiselle, but ours. We pay for it and have control of it."

"So there was some definite purpose in secreting me here away from my friends?"

"Assuredly, a purpose very definite, and one from which we do not intend to be swerved, mademoiselle."

"What then do you purpose doing with me?"

"We plan taking you before the king—not the king of Gretzhoffen, but our own king, Cortislaw of Grahoffen. He wishes to see you, mademoiselle."

Kitty turned back into the room and Sachio, irritated at the delay, went so far as to take her by the arm to induce her to leave the room with him. She resisted him so vigorously that for the time he stood back nonplussed.

But at length the girl's powers proved no match for those brought against her. She was forced from the room toward the front of the building.

Once more Kitty adopted the policy of Roleau himself—she ceased to struggle when she found struggling useless, and lay back to wait until a time when resistance might be more effective.

"Very well, then, gentlemen," said she. "Do as you like. I am weaker than yourselves. Since you are men and gentlemen, naturally you are strong."

Count Sachio made no answer to her biting words. In truth, matters had not gone so well with him as he would have liked. He had been ordered to report to his own king, and now must soon make that report, and certainly he could not tell of the unqualified success which he had so confidently hoped.

The insignificant distance which separated these two kingdoms was



Kitty Tries to Make Friends With the Old Keeper.

spanned in hours, somewhat to the wonderment of Kitty, schooled in the great distances of her own country.

Arrived in the capital of Grahoffen, she was allowed small time to arrange her toilet or compose herself after the fatigue of the journey. Very presently she was brought before King Cortislaw himself.

She found him an old man, thin, wrinkled, crabbed, irritable, excitable. Cortislaw regarded the young girl steadily as she stood before him.

"So this is the woman?" he demanded of Count Sachio, who stood humbly by.

"The same, your majesty. She can explain what you desire to know."

The king looked intently at something he held in his hand. Kitty caught sight of it—it was the half coin which she had once possessed, which had been taken from her but lately by these men. Evidently Count Sachio had turned it over forthwith to its royal possessor.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "tell me what it says. The inscription is

broken. I wish to know it all. I am informed that you have seen both halves of this coin, and therefore know the entire message. Read it to me at once."

Kitty took the coin in her hand as though to study it, but swiftly put her own hand behind her back as she clutched it.

"It is my property," said she stoutly. "Not even a king can take away property without course of law."

Even a king was astonished at the effrontery of the young girl—who held her possession until two sturdy guards forced the coin from her hand. The king smiled at her, a somewhat toothless smile.

"So you value it? Many do. We are willing to pay for what we have, mademoiselle—and the message of this coin we mean to have. Give it to us, and you shall be set free."

"Your majesty is liberal—you offer what is already mine—the right to liberty. But what you ask is impossible for me. True, I have seen each half of the coin—even I saw both halves at one time—but never have I read the entire inscription."

"But you have seen both halves," went on Cortislaw. "Tell me, what was on the other half?"

"Your majesty, I cannot—I do not know."

"By the saints of our fathers," exclaimed Cortislaw, "if this were in the olden days the torture chamber should show you something. But now—"

"The torture could wring only deception from me, your majesty, and that deception would be of no service to you. I have told you the truth—and that alone can serve you. Give me my liberty again—and then perhaps I might learn more of the other half of the coin."

"The girl argues well," said Cortislaw. "I am not sure whether or not she speaks truth, but her argument goes to the same thing in either case. Let her go under guard—perhaps something may arise to give us further insight into this."

"As for you, Count Sachio, you have not yet succeeded in what was asked of you—you have not yet taught us where lies the hidden treasure of Gretzhoffen!"

"Your majesty," replied the count, reddening, "it is but inadvertence, which shall be amended. In my zeal I fancied your majesty would rather have this young woman than to have the other half of the coin. To secure that may require yet more time."

The king fixed on him the cold smile which his courtiers had learned to dread, yet he could not fail to see the shrewdness of Sachio's reply.

"At least guard her, then," said he dryly. "She shall be our guest until we learn more of what she knows. It means too much to forego the full reading of that coin these days. I mean to have it. I trust all my officers will realize that fact."

"Mademoiselle," said Sachio to Kitty, later, when she had been withdrawn to quarters which virtually were to prove a prison to her. "You have heard what the king has said—he will allow you to return to your own country unharmed if you but help him to the meaning of that inscription. What is it to you? It is only idle curiosity brings you hither. With us it may mean the life or death of our country."

Kitty gave herself up to certain reflections at the time. As to war between the two kingdoms, if it came, why should she aid Grahoffen against the country with which she had become more familiar? Neither had done her much courtesy, true, but for some strange reason her sympathies were not with the country governed by this irascible and unlovely king.

"Think well, mademoiselle," went on Sachio. "It is a long way from here to your country. The coin can mean but little to you at best."

"It may mean much to me," broke out Kitty suddenly. "Listen. This coin is not the property of your king or of that other king. It is the property of the people of these countries. It seeks to tell them its story—not to any king for his selfish purposes—but it seeks to make known its appeal for justice and liberty. What, think you the people will forever be content to remain a shuttlecock between you two?"

A moment later and he had left her once more to her own devices.

CHAPTER XXX.

King Michael of Gretzhoffen.

Meantime in Gretzhoffen town the people remained irresolute, uncertain, making no further overt attempt at the long-pending revolution. And as they waited their king amused himself after such fashions as had long been his own. Continually he changed, sometimes hoping, again dreading; and as often as he changed he sent for Count Frederick, on whom he leaned in fatuous confidence.

"But, my dear count," he reproached that gentleman one day, "you have left one errand uncompleted. You have brought us our

coin back again, that is true, but the young lady who we fancied would come after it still remains absent from our court. There has been no word from her for many days."

"True, your majesty, she has disappeared, it seems. I do not, myself, know where she is."

"You have made inquiry at her usual place of residence—some hotel, was it not? An absurd thing, for such a woman as herself to live in a hotel."

"At her hotel," replied Count Frederick, "they know nothing. They tell me that she comes and goes at all hours, and leaves no word as to her return. Nearly two weeks ago she left, and has not yet returned."

"There may be many reasons," continued the count, "for her continued absence. Perhaps the business upon which she came is not yet completed. Perhaps her employers have called her away. Perhaps she may have been intimidated by certain obstacles in her way?"

"By whom, Count Frederick?"

"Well, she has seemed curious herself regarding the coin. Perhaps she knew somewhat of it—"

"So she also has studied this trinket that we gave her? Very well—we meant it to prove of interest."

"Doubtless. But regarding the coin so many threats have been made—"

"Threats? What threats? What do you know of any?"

"Many things come to my ears, your majesty, but I strive to keep them from your own ears so much as may be when I find them unwelcome."

"The most unwelcome thing that could come to us, my dear Frederick, is the absence of this young woman now. Where, think you, she may be?"

"I could not guess, unless perhaps she may have returned to her own country—in which case we shall never see her again, your majesty. We can make examination of the passenger lists of all sailings within the last two weeks. I will look into that. If she has not gone back to her own country, she either remains in this somewhere, or in some other near by."

"You do not mean Grahoffen?"

Count Frederick nodded. "That is what I do mean. In truth, your majesty, there are Grahoffen spies in this city—they were even at your ball. Perhaps they concern themselves with this young lady. Why not? If they

the young girl, Sachio grew somewhat grave. "This," said he, "is a matter for the king."

But the king was in no too good humor over all these failures.

"What, Sachio," said he, "you come to me once more with these old woman's tales? If your time is so short before your secret is discovered, then all the more reason for diligence on your part. It is not the business of kings to accept reasons for failure in performance. The girl is still available—complete your errand with her—bring to me the reading of the coin. I know well enough that if Count Frederick comes he will be different from his king."

Therefore once more Sachio went back to his bootless interviews with Kitty, once more pleading with her to give him all knowledge she had of the coin. And once more Kitty could no more than reassure him of her own ignorance of what he wished to know.

She heard odds and ends of information which taught her which way the wind sat at Grahoffen capital. Sometimes she heard Sachio, again Bartel, again this or that man, speaking freely of the plans at hand.

"I told the king," said Bartel one time, speaking to Count Sachio, "that all is ripe for the shaking of the tree. I told him that we have full plans of all their fortifications and defenses—that their resistance will be but nominal. Once we get the Gretzhoffen coffers opened, times will be easier in our country."

"Yes, once you do," rejoined Sachio grimly. "But tell us how!"

Kitty, really owing allegiance to neither of these kingdoms, both of which had done her such repeated injustice, hardly stopped to ask herself why she found her own leanings towards Gretzhoffen, the scene of most of the indignities she had met.

She must escape for every reason—so she assured herself. But how?

From the windows she had a full view of the well-kept grounds of the palace and of the boulevards surrounding it. She stood alone one day staring out on scenes grown familiar to her. But all at once her gaze grew more intent, fixed upon some object near at hand. A car was standing at the curb. She did not remember to have seen it there regularly.

The two giant grenadiers to whom had been assigned the duty of watch-



Kitty Escapes From the Palace.

suspect that she had part of the coin—and it was easily seen by any that once she did have that part—might they not undertake to make trouble for their own purposes with her?"

"But what good would come of that?"

Count Frederick saw that his argument had gone too far for his own purposes. He did not care to tell the king all he knew, yet his zeal for Kitty had led him far.

"Much good might come to Grahoffen's war department, your majesty, if they knew our secrets. Perhaps they thought she could give some information."

"But you do not predict trouble between us and our neighbor—you do not mean war?"

"Your majesty, I predict nothing these days, but always it is well to be prepared."

"You disturb me sorely—I do not speak to me of war—I cannot endure the thought—I do not wish to hear of it."

As it chanced, much of this conversation came to the ear of one of Sachio's agents, the spy Bartel, still hanging about the city of Gretzhoffen. He overheard enough in his passing by at the time of this conversation to be advised that the king of Gretzhoffen intended to make search for the missing American. Not hesitating, he himself now sped off for his employer to communicate this news that he had learned.

He found Sachio aloof and discontented, out of favor in the court, and somewhat at a loss what next to do. At the thought of a definite demand on the part of King Michael—or rather on the part of Count Frederick—upon their kingdom for the person of

You seek to explain that to me? After her, dullard, and bring her back in twenty-four hours—or else do not return. You guess my meaning, Sachio?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

Again in Gretzhoffen.

Pursuit? Kitty laughed at the thought as she felt under her the strong pulse of the great machine.

She had taken the driver's seat, and as the car was of left-hand drive, for the time she had no opportunity to look into the tonneau, had she liked. Listening to the swift purr of the smooth motor, she did not at first hear the sound of a chuckling laugh which at length broke out into a hearty gust of laughter.

She turned her eyes swiftly at risk of capsting the car—and found herself gazing directly into the face of the man whom of all others she would most have preferred to see.

Even now he came crawling across the top of the seat to join her in the front of the car.

"Roleau!" she exclaimed. "Is it indeed you? Are you always to be the deus ex machina in all my difficulties—literally you are that now!"

"I do not know what you mean by that, excellency," said Roleau, as he took the steering wheel from her, "but I have been in this machine for some time. I was satisfied that did you escape from the palace you would need a means of getting away. All I needed to do was to wait patiently. So you have come. As soon as I could make my own escape I secured this car—a good one—and I followed. It was very simple, as you see."

"At least a near squeak this time, Roleau," said Kitty. "They never meant for me to escape."

"They do not mean it now, excellency," said Roleau, nodding behind him, where he knew pursuit even now was beginning. "I will drive now as I have never driven before. 'Tis a sweet engine, and it rides well. They will drive fast who follow us."

All of which was so literally true that before long the desert miles once more had sped beneath them and Kitty found herself again in the city she was more than ever disposed to call her home. They found entrance to the Ritz hotel at the rear door, in view of their own travel-stained condition.

"Excellency," said the grieved and pained clerk, when at length she made her way to the desk, "I was on the point of removing your belongings and making other arrangements for your apartments."

"By what right?" demanded Kitty. "They are paid for in advance—why should they not be ready for me when I come?"

"But we did not hear when you would return."

"There are many things one does not hear—perhaps you may hear very little of my own business and my plans. I pay for service here. Please care for me, therefore, and my man—we both are tired."

"You have been inquired for in your absence, excellency. The Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen—"

"Indeed, and what could he want?"

"He has been here twice, excellency, but yesterday he came the last time. He said he came on message of the king—which gave me warrant for what he asked."

"And what was that?"

"Access to your apartments. He said it was the command of the king."

"And you dared give him such access?"

"We dared not do less, excellency. He was most courteous in one way—asked many questions regarding yourself; but as to search of your apartments he made none, or next to none. He seemed to care for nothing that he saw, save one little picture, a portrait."

Kitty remained but briefly in her own rooms. She took a swift glance about. Everything seemed in place, much as she had left it—no search apparently had been made of any of the cabinets or drawers. There had been a little picture—one of herself—left on the dressing table. It was gone! She missed nothing else.

CHAPTER XXXII.

In the Name of the King.

It was plain enough to Count Sachio which way Kitty would head in her flight. Her car was little more than out of sight on the Gretzhoffen road, ere Sachio himself was in pursuit.

Count Sachio himself was no blunderer, and no common thief-chaser, but a courtier and a man of intelligence. He knew it would be futile to make a direct demand of the hotel management regarding the whereabouts of the young American. Therefore, while he himself approached the hotel desk to engage the clerks in conversation, he sent two of his own men—one of them Bartel, the spy, who had been established here so long—by way of a rear staircase to find Kitty's room and report to him what they learned.

He stood for some time making polite speeches with the desk men and the porters, asking for certain information as to routes and distances, but all the time burning with impatience that he heard no report from his messengers. As he stood, there came news of them—startling news enough. There came shrieking down the stairs, incoherent, babbling, a maid who called out to the clerk, or to any who would hear her!

"A man," she cried—"A man—killed in her room—the young American's room—murdered—it is murder, I tell you!"

"The officials of the hotel took prompt action.

"Close all the doors," ordered the

porter. "Clear the corridors at once, in the king's name. Apprehend the murderer whoever it may be. Have the gendarmes come at once. You, boy—run I say."

It was hue and cry once more, and Sachio was glad enough that his own alibi was plain, for he knew not what now might happen. One of his men rejoined him—the spy Bartel. The other remained behind—his fate unknown as yet.

As for Kitty, she was at this moment once more away from her hotel and once more in the stately palace of Count Frederick.

She entered softly, leaving Roleau as usual somewhat remote, to guard against any sudden intrusion. Once more she cast about a searching gaze upon the details of the place. All its



Sachio Takes Advantage of Kitty's Helplessness. But is Interrupted by a Guard.

disorder had been removed. Spick and span in military neatness the apartment lay before her.

Upon the dresser, in full view, openly displayed, was a picture in a little frame—a frame of silver set in brilliant gems. She looked at it suddenly—it was the portrait of herself which once had stood on her own dressing table in her hotel! Now it was here. Why? Kitty felt a strange flush come to her face.

Something now arrested her—she paused, reluctant to resume a search which ever had been distasteful to her. No, she would not touch a thing—had he not done as much for her—had he not been more respectful than herself of another's privacy? If he had taken anything from her apartments it was but—this. And apparently he had cherished it. No, she would not search for the coin. She would leave this country disappointed, if need be.

But there lay, just at the foot of the little portrait, an object which caught her eye. It was the half coin of Gretzhoffen!

Yes, here it was in full view, openly displayed, that any might see it who liked, who chanced to be there. Apparently Count Frederick felt that all pursuit of the coin had ended—that no longer could any intruder gain access to his palace.

Kitty hesitated for a moment. The appeal of the coin came to her once more. She took it up, held it in her hand, gazed at it—and once more, as so often had been the case—she found herself surprised at the very moment of her success.

She heard Count Frederick's quiet footsteps, his calm voice behind her. "Mademoiselle, again!"

The count stood there regarding her.

"Evidently, mademoiselle, you did not realize that these repeated visits rendered necessary the installation of an electric system of my own devising—you see, I knew of your presence, and as you see, I have come. You rang. Of what service can I be, mademoiselle?"

"Leave me alone," panted Kitty, her face hot, tears almost in her eyes. "I hate you! I hate you!"

"I grieve at that, mademoiselle," said Count Frederick evenly. "I wish I could say the same of you—but I cannot. With every reason to distrust you—I cannot. Continually we cross swords, do we not? And you were easy to deceive this time. See—you are trapped as simply as a bird which steps into its cage without hesitation."

"Will you not give me back my coin, mademoiselle? Will you not add it to the other? Will you not assist me in reading the message of the coin, so that we may make an end of all this—so that we may not continually cross swords with one another?"

In answer Kitty darted past him, found her way into the hall, ran she knew not where. Before her lay a little narrow stairway, and she sprang up it, hoping to find egress somewhere. Alas! the door that closed the head of the stair was locked. She heard his low laugh as an iron grille snapped across the opening, cutting off escape.

"Won't you give it me now—my coin?" he asked.

Silence reigned in the great white marble palace of Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen.

And now, far off in other parts of the city, where men sought one who had done a crime, there rose in the streets the sound of hurrying feet, with the warning cry, "In the name of the king!"

(To Be Continued.)