

THE BROKEN COIN

A Story of Mystery and Adventure

By EMERSON HOUGH

From the Scenario of GRACE CUNARD

Novelized From the Motion Picture Drama of the Same Name. Produced by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company.



SYNOPSIS.

Kitty Gray, newspaper woman, finds in a curio shop half of a broken coin, the mutilated inscription on which arouses her curiosity and leads her, at the order of her managing editor, to go to the principality of Gretzhoffen to piece out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed, and on arrival in Gretzhoffen her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin begin.

ELEVENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Virtue of Necessity.
"He is killed!" cried Kitty Gray, as she stood, still uncertain as to the result of Count Frederick's desperate leap toward the moving train. "I cannot look!"

But presently she did look—both she and Roleau passing not forward on the train but to the rear of the car which they occupied. Amazed, they saw Count Frederick struggling to his feet. "Now, Roleau," she cried, "we must be quick! If the count has taken this desperate chance it was for some desperate purpose back of it. He knows about the coin—we must get it before he does, and that means at once."

"How shall that be done, excellency?" said Roleau, puzzled for just a moment.

"I have it!" said Kitty, as they hurried deeper into the car that they might not be seen by Count Frederick. "Wait. I will send a message to him—we will ask him to walk into our parlor."

She seated herself for a moment and hastily wrote a few lines on a page of her note book, smiling as she did so.

"Tians!" she laughed. "I am now a leader in Grahoffen diplomacy. Does not my writing seem formal?"

"We send it forward by the guard?"

"Yes, Roleau, get him quick—give him this money—we will wait here in the drawing room near to the front door of our car. The guard must not tell him who we are."

But even as they waited, intent on the success of this somewhat transparent ruse, Kitty heard the step of the guard behind her, and turned. Yes, Bartel of Grahoffen was with him, a puzzled expression on his face, the note still in his hand.

"It was this lady sent me, monsieur," explained the guard, and, witnessing the stiff surprise of all concerned, was willing enough to step aside and leave explanation to others.

"Indeed," said Bartel—and himself would have been equally glad to escape, for there was no one in the world whom he less expected or less desired to see than this young American who now faced him smiling.

"You here?—How can it be possible, mademoiselle?" said he. "Did you fall from the sky?"

As he spoke any shrewd pickpocket would have known in which pocket he had concealed the coin; for unconsciously his hand dropped over it.

"Others also!" smiled Kitty Gray, and pointed through the rear window of the car to the flat on which Count Frederick stood. He even now was turning to pass forward into the train.

An exclamation passed from Bartel's lips. "Heaven protect us," said he, "the thing is bewitched!"

He turned and disappeared once more in the forward part of the train. For a moment Kitty thought of following him, but concluded that he would make no attempt to conceal the coin. Since he was so nearly at his destination he would continue to keep it on his person. Therefore she turned to the rear of the car.

"Monsieur le Comte Frederick!" she exclaimed now, greeting the tall figure which approached her. "You come unannounced."

Count Frederick gazed at her for a moment in somewhat open admiration. "Listen," said he at length. "Why should we make any three-cornered fight of this at a moment such as this, when so much is at stake? Why should we not unite against yonder man, a common enemy, who has what we both desire? Beyond belief we are lucky that we are both here alive. Yonder man has the coin—I know that as well as you do. In half an hour he will be free. Once in Grahoffen with the coin, he may have farewell to us and all our hopes. Come, mademoiselle, shall we be enemies or allies? You are wise enough to see what I mean."

"Yes! And I suppose you to be sportsman enough to play fair with us at least. You have not always done so."

"That," said Count Frederick slowly, the red blood mantling his dark skin, "is the bitterest cut I have known in all my life. I have asked your forgiveness before now—have told you it was my man alone who offered you violence—not I. On the contrary, I have admired your own courage and resourcefulness all the way through. It seems to me you will have evened any offense I ever gave to you."

"At least," said she, "one good turn deserves another, and we have little

time to talk. Well, then, will you continue to fight fair if I join you as ally against Grahoffen in this case?"

"It is agreed," said Count Frederick. "Yes! And let fortune later determine between us as to which of us ultimately shall own the coin. Where is he?"

"He passed forward but now," said Kitty.

They turned once more to seek the guard. Once more he led them forward. This time they all took concealment back of a door which Bartel must pass as he left the train.

Nervous, eager to be off the train and into safety as soon as might be, Bartel was early in hurrying his luggage to the door, and himself followed it even before the train was coming to its stop at Grahoffen town. He passed by the place of concealment of the three conspirators, and hearing some slight sound turned to see the face of Count Frederick staring straight at him—to feel at the same time the iron arm of Roleau cast about his neck. The sinewy fingers of Count Frederick supplemented the assault of his man, and between these two Bartel was helpless. He felt a hand rifling his pockets, but as for himself could make no outcry. Just as the train slowed up at the entrance into the yards, they flung him to the floor, where he lay limp.

"I have it," cried Count Frederick, and held up the Gretzhoffen half coin before Kitty's eyes. He placed it then in his own pocket.

"Why not give it to Roleau as an impartial third party?" asked Kitty demurely.

Count Frederick caught the challenge and responded to it.

"Very well," said he. "Roleau himself shall be the lord high keeper of the coin until further orders. But look yonder."

As he handed Roleau the coin, he nodded now to the window, behind which could be seen the ranked soldiery of Grahoffen, filling the space of the station platform. Apparently they had been summoned to receive the agent of the king.

They passed back swiftly to the rear of the train, and as it came to a stop all three of them dropped off on the farther side. While the officials and the soldiery were searching the train the fugitives were making their way off to the mountain side where there seemed at least some slight chance of escape from discovery.

CHAPTER XL.

The Escape.

The grind of the wheels under the brakes had hardly ceased when a high official of the court of Grahoffen sprang aboard the train, looking this way and that expectantly, peering through the windows and doors of coach after coach. But he did not find the man he sought. Hurrying through the last car of the train, at last he half-stumbled over the limp form of Bartel lying on the floor where Roleau's arm had flung him, neck and crop.

"Quick here!" he called out. "Here's murder—but by whom? Where have they got to? After them, men!"

But now some sort of answer to their questioning came in a shout from the station platform. Someone was pointing beyond the train up the mountain-side. The official sprang forward.

"After them, men! They must have done this," cried he. "They have what we seek."

A band of mounted men an instant later rode out of the station in full pursuit of the fugitives. They raced down the road, toward a bridge which spanned the stream ahead.

"Look yonder, excellency!" exclaimed Roleau at length, as he turned and faced down the slope to gaze at these pursuers. "They will cut us off ahead. Look—they are riding for the bridge!"

He looked this way and that, as the three paused uncertain. At last his eyes fell upon a vast boulder that lay near by the edge of the ridge upon which they stood. He cast a swift glance below, lining up the course of the boulder straight down to the bridge below. Bracing himself, he threw his shoulders against the boulder, exercising every ounce of his own prodigious strength.

The advancing soldiery heard the roar of the coming danger, saw how imminent was the danger from it, but some of the riders were already at the bridge itself as it struck. It crashed through the timbers as if they had been straw. What had been the bridge was a ruin. Horses, riders—all were carried down into the stream below.

"Come, now," cried Kitty's companion to her once more as they saw the pursuit arrested. "On ahead there may be a better place—we may yet get through if we hasten."

At length, well-nigh spent, they flung themselves down in this place of greater security. Far below they could see mounted men still coming.

such silent answer as they could. Each drew his weapon and prepared it for what might next ensue.

"We can hold them for a little time," said Count Frederick, judicially. "But we must not lose—our cause is too good to be lost!" exclaimed Kitty. "I will not yield to fate—I will not give up! If I myself could escape perhaps I could get to Gretzhoffen at last and bring back help for you, if you could wait long enough."

"It is a good plan," said Count Frederick, suddenly. "There is danger in it, but not so much for you as for either of us. You are good on your feet, mademoiselle—what shall I say?"

But Kitty had made her own resolve. Roleau extended his hand to her. She took the coin into her possession, unseen by Frederick. A moment later she was speeding away, crouching, attempting to cut in ahead of the mounted men below.

CHAPTER XLII.

King Michael to the Rescue.

In Gretzhoffen capital matters had gone ill enough this day. The populace was on edge with excitement over the mysterious murder.

The prefect of police was furious over the results of the day's work. He knew that for some time he had been under the king's suspicion for laxness in the administration of his office and felt that it was time to make some example, to produce some proof of his own vigilance.

"You, Anselm, you Du Brock," he ordered two of his most trusted men—"go out—find these people—we must have them in our own hands. Turn night into day and day into night until you have them once more. The girl is with them—be sure of that—find her and you will find Roleau, the answer to all these riddles."

These members of his staff, thus adjured, made their way out, none too happy at the task assigned them, for they knew well enough that now they were to cope with active brains and active bodies. Learning that the escape of the accused had been made by the railway train, for a time they hung about the station in search of further news. They spent some hours there—

"Your majesty, it is because they want what belongs here in Gretzhoffen—they covet the Gretzhoffen coin."

"The coin? What coin? Impossible! I have it myself—at least a half of it, mademoiselle."

"You—your majesty—how can that be? For see, I myself have it—I fled with it to get safety for it."

King Michael's wits were not quick enough to meet this sudden demand upon them.

"It travels, that coin—I would not believe that you could have it. So now they think he has it and have coveted it? Shall yonder ruffian Cortislaw take from us that which is ours? No, mademoiselle, you are right! You are a faithful messenger to bring us this news. Listen, I myself will go to the rescue!"

"Your majesty speaks as a king," said Kitty Gray.

Pomposely, the less rapid for his avoirdupois, King Michael turned now to the halls.

"Call out the guard!" he commanded. "Sound the bugles now and bring me my officers here. Quick, equip me, you men—we must ride—the troops must form."

The word passed quickly. Within the half hour iron hoofs rang on the pavements of Gretzhoffen avenue as the guard, their sovereign at their head, rode out at speed.

Left in the care of one of the household women, Kitty was shown to a room of her own, where she might the better arrange her apparel and dispose herself for rest. She did not know anything of Sachio's presence in the palace—indeed, Michael himself had not been aware of that; but that crafty individual, readily enough learning what was meant by all this excitement, himself sped away from the palace even before the guard was out.

On the mountain side where they had been left, Count Frederick and Roleau, once master and man, now partners elbow to elbow in a common cause, lay and looked down.

As they looked they saw the advance of the troops below them halted. Why was this?

"Surely," chuckled Roleau unconcerned, "we have beaten their whole army, the two of us! Are they no



King Cortislaw Counts His Dead.

of it at least. Precisely as much could be said for Grahoffen. The old king, Cortislaw, was shaking in his wrath and humiliation that he had but half the coin.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The Torture Chamber.

As for the young American herself, she had remained these hours alone in the palace of the king.

The palace, as she now reflected, was more nearly deserted than ever she had seen it. The household staff seemed disorganized. Fright had caught hold of all. The most conflicting rumors went this way and that.

"I wonder," said Kitty Gray to herself after a time, as she sat alone—"I wonder!"

Now, what she wondered had to do with certain questions which she long had had in her own mind.

"Cruciatl cam"—did 'cam' mean 'camera'—'chamber'—torture chamber?"

If so, where was that torture chamber? Was it under the battlements yonder, or here in the palace itself? Where had the old king concealed his wealth?

She rang the bell and summoned once more the woman of the palace who thus far had cared for her at the king's behest.

"Margot," said she, "talk to me. I am distressed—nervous perhaps. Talk to me."

"We are all distressed, excellency," said the woman. "We know not what there may be yonder. Perhaps this moment the two kingdoms may be at war. But what can I do to make your excellency more comfortable?"

She was willing enough to curry favor with a favorite of the king.

"Tell me Margot," demanded Kitty Gray, "about this country here. I am a stranger from a far country, and I know very little of this land and of its customs. Is it an old land, this of Gretzhoffen, Margot?"

"More immemorially old, your excellency, than most people have ever dreamed of. The first kings of Gretzhoffen date back so far in history that almost they merge into myths. The oldest kingdoms of Europe are not so old as this little one."

"Does the history of this country date back so far as the middle ages?"

"Oh, easily. We are very old," smiled Margot.

"Those also were times of war and bloodshed, were they not? Why, Margot, in those days they tortured prisoners, did they not?"

"Not only prisoners, excellency, but many others. If a king wished news or money, if an official wished confession of a crime—if a bishop desired confession of faith from a heretic—the torture chamber was the place to get such results."

"But not here, Margot—surely not here?"

"These very walls saw it, excellency yes!"

"But that was long ago—those places were all wiped out and forgotten ages since."

"Destroyed? Indeed, not. Do not the people of this country always preserve their monuments, their museums of weapons, their chambers of horrors? Do they not take a certain pride in that? Monarchs even of today know the secrets of the old torture chambers in this land, and perhaps in many another."

"I could not have believed it! And so there was such a place here, in this palace?"

"Surely. I can give warrant for every word I have told you, excellency. The tradition is that the old torture chamber of Gretzhoffen was over yonder—under the corner tower of the palace—where the embattlements ran in. There is a corridor which leads yonder, down below, into the vaults. I would not go there for all the world. Few of us know the way, indeed—I have never been there. We folk of Gretzhoffen palace—we are wise enough not to ask too many questions, or to learn too many truths. Besides, I should die with terror to think of what spirits must haunt such a place. But, excellency," she concluded, "let us speak of more pleasant things."

"Would you take me yonder, Margot?" asked Kitty. The woman crossed herself devoutly. "Not on my life!" said she. "Never in the world! If it be true that the chambers are there, let others prove the truth. I do not know."

"It was but a fancy," said Kitty, turning to her couch and feigning weariness. "I will call you, Margot."

Kitty listened until her footfalls had quite died away; then, swiftly, she engaged herself upon the errand which all this time she had been planning.

She stole from her own apartments into the hall, passed along it toward the farther corner where stood the tower, until she came to another stair. Arrived upon this floor, she found herself unnoticed—that part of the palace was deserted.

Trusting only to a general sense of direction, she passed on and down—finding her own way through the labyrinth of passages, until at length she had reached the subterranean vaults which lay beneath the main edifice of the palace building.

About her now lay dampness, silence. The gloom of it all weighed heavily upon even her stout soul, used as she was by this time to terrors. But still she pushed on, the little candle which she had brought with her lighting the gloom at least faintly. She could not tell now where she was. Only there came to her the vague conviction that if there were secrets in the palace this was the way to find them. Therefore she followed such passages as opened from time to time ahead.

There were walls of rock now on each side of her, whether of heavy masonry or hewn granite she could not tell, her light flickered so faintly on them. But at length she found herself at the end of the winding passageway. A heavy door stood before her.

Kitty flashed her light this way and that to see if she could find trace of any other visitors. The dust of the floor lay unbroken. Dust, fine, impalpable, lay on the great metal latch of the door itself. There was a lock,



"Yonder at the Edge of the Neutral Lands, Men Are Fighting!"

yes, a vast and cumbersome affair of iron. She tried it. It did not yield. Where then was the key, if there was one?

With no special plan, she cast her light here and there along the wall. She found at last, near to the jamb of the heavy door, an iron prong projecting from the wall on it a vast and rusty bit of iron—the key.

With all her strength she twisted the great key. At length she felt the lock turn, yield. One moment she halted, and then threw her weight against the door. It swung open, silently. She found herself within.

Had anyone, whether friend or foe, been near to Kitty Gray at that time, they would have heard her sudden scream of mortal terror—would have seen her fall and crumple, in a limp heap, on the floor.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



A Band of Mounted Men an Instant Later Rode Out in Full Pursuit.

but departed just too soon to welcome the return of one of the fugitives they sought—none less than Kitty Gray herself!

Safe from immediate pursuit, Kitty paused for a little rest and a little food. What should she do? For a time she was undecided, but presently her resolution was made.

"I will try it," said she to herself. "I will go to the palace direct. I will see if I can get access to the king!"

And thither, forsooth, she did turn her way.

Rank by rank of the guard she passed by this way or that, wheedling them, threatening them, bribing them, until she found herself within the doors of the palace.

"Mademoiselle, again!" exclaimed King Michael. "Welcome, then." His mottled face did indeed express gratification at seeing her once more.

Kitty first made apology for her disordered apparel. "I ask your majesty's pardon," said she, "for my plight. I am sure of my welcome only because of the news I bring—I am from the front—the war!"

"The front—the war—mademoiselle, what do you mean? What war? We are not at war!" But even as he spoke the blood shrank back from his face.

"There is war, your majesty, if I may say it," rejoined the young girl. "Yonder at the edge of the neutral lands, this side of Grahoffen, men are fighting. Their army is out—they have besieged our people."

"Our people?—Who are our people?"

"Two only—one a friend of your majesty—another of my own."

"Meaning?"

"None less than Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen is there besieged at a little pass in the mountains. With him is Roleau, my servant, whom you do not know. Horsemen were all about them when I left. They were holding the little pass as best they could."

"But what caused all this—why were they besieged?"

braver than that, these men of Grahoffen!"

"Something has happened below there," rejoined Count Frederick. "We could not hold out against their forces, and it is not fear that has halted them."

They turned in the other direction, gazing across the edge of the plain along the upper Gretzhoffen roadway. A cloud of dust was advancing swiftly.

"Who goes there, master?" said Roleau. "Are they men of this kingdom or of our own?"

The eyes of Count Frederick kindled at the sight. "By the Lord!" said he, "the girl has won! Now they are coming—it is police duty for neither of these, but army against army! Will it be war, or peace?"

In the event, it proved to be peace. The counsel of Count Sachio prevailed. Cortislaw's inborn prudence held back his hand even now, angered as he was at this failure to secure possession of the coveted coin on which he counted so surely to mend his own waning fortunes. He sent forward a band of trumpeters with a white flag for a parley. They met the advancing forces of King Michael. There were explanations, apologies. Within an hour after the dust cloud first had been discovered, Count Frederick was shaking the hand of his own monarch and making such explanations as he might of this scene of turbulence.

"There were two of us only, your majesty," said he, laughing, and pointing up the mountain side to the steep ridge they had left. "Two, beside the young woman."

"Yes, yes—she came—she brought the news. You owe your safety to her, as usual."

The pourparler at length ended, the two bodies of armed men saluted, each dipping its banner to the other. And so, with much sounding of trumpets, each turned back in its own direction. The leaders of each army turned back as well to problems of their own. The coin was now in Gretzhoffen—or half