

# 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 coffee 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.

### SECOND INSTALLMENT

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### Count Frederick.

Kitty Gray turned suddenly to the man seated beside her in the motor, bending upon him a steady gaze. "Who are you?" asked she. "Why did you follow me?"

"The swathed figure suddenly straightened. 'Whatever I am—whatever you may think me, do not believe me incapable of gratitude to yourself.' 'What is your name?'"

"They call me Roleau, mademoiselle." Kitty Gray turned yet more closely to him, gazed straight into his eyes. "Then why not enlist with me? Surely we have a common cause. We have a common enemy. Would it be wrong did you and I league against him?"

"You ask me, then—'To be my friend, my ally.'" "Surely I owe him no allegiance further!" exclaimed Roleau bitterly. "He struck me like a dog."

"Yet you and I must see him again—and soon." "What! Would you trust yourself once more in his presence? You are an American girl—you are innocent, you are ignorant. I warn you."

"None the less, if I am to go forward with the business which brought me here to Gretzhoffen, surely I must once more meet the Count Frederick. The man at her side hesitated no more than an instant. 'Very well,' said he calmly. 'As for me, my life has been forfeit many a time before now. What matter? I will go with you as you say. Indeed, I fancy I now why you ask me to go—they follow me at the palace—they will add it up both.'"

It was as Roleau had said. When finally the two drew up to the court driveway in front of the count's palace, they were admitted without question. Roleau closed the door behind him and put a finger to his lips for silence.

"They will listen," he whispered. "Be careful. This is the room where Count Frederick receives his friends." Curiously, silently, Kitty sat or at times walked about the room, taking stock of the surroundings. Count Frederick entered.

"Mademoiselle! I am charmed! So you remember me?" "You may say as much indeed," rejoined Kitty Gray calmly. "I saw you in the carriage this morning."

He turned now to Roleau, with no change in his countenance to indicate any recollection of the nature of their last meeting. "You may retire to the next room," said he, dismissing him with a wave of the hand.

"Do not in the least misunderstand me, Monsieur le Comte," said she lightly. "My business is very simple. I have a proposition to make to you—a business proposition."

at her, his strong fingers turned the key in the lock, removed it, thrust it into his pocket. "Mademoiselle," he said calmly, "you say you came on business. Very well, let us talk business. We know something of the history of a certain broken coin. Very good. You have half of it. We will say I have the other. Give me your half the coin, and I will let you go. Refuse, and I'll never let you go."

"I will do nothing under compulsion from you or any other man," said Kitty Gray stoutly. "I offer you a fair price for your half of the coin."

"No! No!" A loud pounding on the door interrupted them at this moment. "It is Roleau," smiled the count. "I will have him whipped."

The face of Kitty Gray had grown like marble. Suddenly, with one swift movement, she dashed her clenched hand with all her force into the face which bent toward her. A livid mark arose under the swift compact. The tall man staggered back. The next instant Kitty felt her wrist caught in an iron grasp. Struggling, she was forced backward. She felt another hand grasp her wrist.

The man Grahame, the count's valet, had appeared mysteriously from the alcove adjoining. "Give me the coin!" insisted Count Frederick still. "Tell me where I may have it—or by the Lord! you will rest a long time to think this matter over."

"Excellent!" ejaculated the man Grahame suddenly. "On guard! He is breaking in the door. Quick, excellency!"

And even as Roleau, by a mighty heave burst in the door, Grahame and his master hurried Kitty to the rear door of the alcove. It made out upon a dimly lighted hall.

Roleau heard them pass, followed swiftly as he could. But it was empty. The purr of a motor getting under way reached his ears. "So, then—we failed," said Roleau bitterly.

Convinced against her will, as she hurried along in the grasp of the two powerful men, that compliance would serve her purpose better than resistance, Kitty Gray took her place on the seat of the motor car.

"More and more I admire you," said the man at her side, as the motor swung into its speed. "What a woman you are! If you would but give me time—"

"You shall have all the time you ask, Monsieur le Comte!" "Still, I ponder as to your motive in all this. It cannot be money."

"Indeed it is money—in part." "How much, mademoiselle?" "A year's salary—I have got much at stake on my word. Twelve hundred dollars, Monsieur le Comte. It is a fortune for me."

Count Frederick flung himself back upon the cushions and laughed long and loud. "Twelve hundred dollars!" said he. "Twelve hundred dollars in a whole year, in an entire year? My dear, give me the half coin you have upon you, and I promise you shall have twelve thousand dollars to spend as you like each and every day of your life, as long as you live. Come now, is it a trade? You said you came to talk business."

face. She fell, stunned, at his feet. "You ruffian, what have you done!" exclaimed his master, as with a thin smile Grahame held up the chamois bag.

But Count Frederick ripped it open, took from it what he saw, and thrust it into his pocket. Even as this happened, the pursuing car was closing in upon them. It was Roleau who sprang from the seat and hastened forward, revolver in hand. As he did so a weapon cracked from the car of Count Frederick, and Roleau, stumbling, fell forward and lay still.

"Come Grahame—quick." An instant later they had taken possession of the motor impressed by Roleau. How long she remained senseless, she herself scarcely knew, but when Kitty stirred, raised her head, she saw lying close beside her the figure of the man who had sought to befriend her.

Kitty suddenly raised her hand to her neck. The cord was gone. The packet was missing. "When after a time she ceased in a useless effort to lug the heavy body of Roleau into the shelter of the car, she turned to gaze about her. She paused, her gaze arrested. Yes, a little caravan, apparently from some far off land, and journeying hither frankly enough across the neutral ground between these two little kingdoms.

The apparent leader of this little caravan was a reticent, dark-bearded man. He advanced now quietly toward the young woman. "The lady is in distress? There has been trouble here—robbers, bandits—your man has been killed, perhaps. Yes, there are many such in this land, between the two kingdoms. There is no law here, mademoiselle. I cross as you see, with my own men armed. I am, if you please, a merchant of Grahame. Sometimes I do a little merchandising between the two kingdoms."

He pointed to the coat of arms on the door of the disabled car. "The Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen has been here."

"Aye, the Count Frederick! It was he who left us here."

He made a gesture now to his attendants, and as some of them lifted the limp form of Roleau, he himself assisted Kitty to mount. A few moments later and the strange procession was again on its way.

"Mademoiselle," said the leader at length, as he drew up alongside, "I must continue on into my own country. We are near the edge of it here. At the little stream which lies just beyond there is a house of a peasant—it is but a hovel and no fit place for you, that is true. But even so, that is better either for you or for your man."

They advanced now a little distance farther, until within full sight of the peasant's little hut, Radoz made signs

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"This Lady is in My Care."

hunt. The apparent leader of the party, a stalwart, sturdy man, dark of hair and richly clad—rode slightly in advance of the others.

Catching sight of a young woman—and a very pretty one—standing thus alone on the forest road, this gentleman pulled up suddenly. "Bonjour, mademoiselle," said Kitty, with her usual recourse to the French language.

"Et bien, c'est que vous parlez Français. And at once he himself broke into voluble French, much to Kitty's delight. "I am an American," she went on to say.

"I ask pardon, mademoiselle," rejoined the dark man—whose bold eyes, after what seemed to Kitty to be the fashion of the country, now were carefully estimating her, line by line—"I beg your pardon, but mademoiselle is alone? Why?"

"My companion is ill yonder at the peasant's house. There was an accident yesterday with our motor—he is not yet able to travel."

"I am riding but now to my own hunting lodge, a few miles yonder at the edge of the forest; why not come with me so that we might speak over this matter? I am entertaining friends there—a little house party—there are other ladies. You will be made welcome. If you can ride—"

"Oh, yes," said Kitty. "I can manage." It was not long before they arrived at the hunting lodge.

Count Sachio introduced his guests with a few words in his own language. They stared politely, smiled discreetly, but made Kitty welcome.

"Now, be off with you all!" exclaimed Count Sachio. "To the woodland paths, since the morning is so fresh."

"Mademoiselle, you will have refreshments?" he asked, as, laughing gaily, the others dispersed. "Nothing more for me than a cup of tea," said Kitty gravely. "I don't think me rude—perhaps it may be well for me to excuse myself. Is there any way in which I may get back to the cottage where I left my man?"

"Not so fast, not so fast as all that, ma chérie! You have not tested out my humble place as well as I would ask. Come, what you think of it?"

Not his words so much as his manner sent swift alarm into Kitty Gray's heart. Swiftly she arose and made back as he, warmed somewhat by his wine, now advanced toward her, smiling. Her gesture angered him and he stepped forward, but more swiftly.

sharp exclamation. "Here come two riding, a man and a woman. I swear, I believe it is the two, both come to life again!"

They advanced now more slowly and pulled up at the foot of a little ravine, where a cross trail came in from the right, leading no one knew where, out into No Man's Land between the two kingdoms of Gretzhoffen and Grahoffen. Here the depression concealed them and they awaited the arrival of the two travelers.

That came in due course, but with it almost synchronously yet other events. A sound of shouting became audible. To the right, along a curving cross-road of the desert, there came into view, riding at top speed, whooping aloud as they spurred forward, a ragged band of drunken ruffians—none less than a party of the banditti which in those somewhat lawless days infested this open and little-traveled region, a sort of No Man's Land.

"Come, your money—your valuables!" exclaimed the leader of these ruffians. "You know me? I am Landoz, chief of the Brotherhood. My men like work none too well, and we must eat and drink. Your money, please—or we will take it whether or not you please."

Contemptuously, Count Frederick reached into his pockets and flung upon the ground before them such valuables as he had.

The bandit now turned to repeat this process with the other two strangers, whom they could not classify as friends or foes of those whom they had now found in the motor car.

"What have we here—a woman, and a beautiful one!" exclaimed the bandit chief. "She wears no jewels—perhaps she has not much money for us. But still, there are other ways. What say you, my fellows, shall we hold her for a ransom?"

The man Roleau here raised his hand and spoke with authority. "My friends," he said, "what I have is little and it is yours, for you are my brothers and I know you must live as well as I. I know you are friends of the king's troops—shortly we will ride thither together, if you don't mind. As for this lady, lay no hand on her. I tell you she is a highness of a foreign land, none less than America across the sea."

"And why not fit for ransom then?" demanded the bandit chief. "Because, I tell you she is one of the ladies of the king's household—she is protected by King Michael II himself, no less. She is of his rank in life. I tell you, my brothers, irresolute the bandit turned toward his men, but a murmur of assent rattled what Roleau had said.

"Good!" said he suddenly. "I know you well, Roleau. The lady is safe with us. We will do more—we will accompany you to the walls of the city itself, so that you may be safe from any of our brotherhood."

Under the walls of Gretzhoffen itself they met a troop of the king's horse, riding out for practice. Their officer was not unknown to Count Frederick—and for that matter, the leader of the banditti, Landoz himself, seemed not unknown. Loitering along, they rode now up to the city's gates.

Yet another event transpired before the two parties separated near the city's gate. An additional party of horsemen, riding hard from the desert, appeared—none less than Count Sachio, a friend or two and a small group of retainers!

"Sachio!" exclaimed Count Frederick. "My friend, you come but just in time."

"I may well believe it," said Sachio dryly, gazing at the assemblage about him. "Had I met this gentleman," he nodded toward Landoz, with whose identity he was well enough acquainted, "perhaps I might have needed greater argument."

"All is well that ends well, my good Sachio!" exclaimed Count Frederick. Be my guest instead of my host. Ride with me now to my own home and at another day I will return with you to your hunting lodge."

"You know this lady?" asked Sachio aside, nodding towards Kitty. "But slightly," rejoined Count Frederick. "And you?"

"But slightly," smiled Sachio, and he told no more.

The girls will soon be resting from their exertions in dancing all winter, by dancing all summer at the hotels.

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Kitty Felt Her Wrist Caught in an Iron Grasp.

that his charges should be assisted in dismounting. The cowlike peasant woman proved not inept in ministrations—perhaps she had seen such hurts as these before in her life here on the border. She made Roleau comfortable.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### Count Sachio of Grahoffen.

At sunrise of the following morning Kitty awoke as suddenly as she had fallen asleep the night before. After her frugal breakfast with the old peasant folk—with whom she could hold no conversation whatever—she set out for the bedside of the faithful attendant who had been injured in her cause.

"Roleau, good morning," she said. "How goes it, then?" "Excellent! I am quite well. I find my wound not to be serious. I can travel."

"Better rest for yet a time," said Kitty. "It will be the best medicine for you. As for myself, I purpose now to go out and spy out the land."

She left him, making some excuse to her peasant hosts, passed out from the little cottage. She walked on steadily, not ill content after all, until just as she arrived at the edge of the forest she noticed advancing from its depths a little party of horsemen, who were riding swiftly toward her on the trail.

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### King Michael II.

When Count Frederick and his accomplice Grahame left their two vic-

#### CHAPTER X.

##### Greek Meets Greek.

Arrived at his own home, Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen found a little pile of unopened letters waiting for him, and picked up one bearing the crest of Count Sachio of Grahoffen, a man he had known for many years and with whom, if truth be told, he had had certain plans which neither would have cared to have come into public knowledge. He tore open the envelope.

"So, Sachio asks me to join him at a little hunting party at his lodge in the forest beyond the neutral ground! I believe I'll go. After all, it might not be a bad thing to find out a little more about the condition of those two we left yonder in the desert. Yes, I'll ride back the very way I just came."



"At Last We Have It!"

him. "Had I met this gentleman," he nodded toward Landoz, with whose identity he was well enough acquainted, "perhaps I might have needed greater argument."

"All is well that ends well, my good Sachio!" exclaimed Count Frederick. Be my guest instead of my host. Ride with me now to my own home and at another day I will return with you to your hunting lodge."

"You know this lady?" asked Sachio aside, nodding towards Kitty. "But slightly," rejoined Count Frederick. "And you?"

"But slightly," smiled Sachio, and he told no more. "Who is she?" asked the captain of the troop, sotto voce, of Roleau. "I tell you all, my friends," answered that sturdy soul. "She is a highness from abroad, an excellency. Take no liberties here. She goes to the palace—she is to meet the king."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)