

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.

THIRD INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER XI.

The King of Gretzhoffen.

"You majesty does me honor." It was with simple dignity that the young American girl spoke these words to the monarch in whose presence she found herself fresh from her late adventures.

"We could not too much honor so charming a representative of your great country, my dear young lady," said Michael.

"Do not misunderstand me, your majesty," resumed the young woman. "It is more than possible I have been brought before you under false pretenses. I am not a person of rank, am indeed but a prisoner taken yonder, by outlaws. But for the wit of my servant I think I might have been held for a ransom."

"It were large ransom would be fit for such hostage as yourself, mademoiselle. Whatever it was it would have been paid, had we but known!" "I thank you, sire. Perhaps there will be no future need. In sooth, from the way the bandit chieftain looked on another of our party, I would rather think he would prefer him to myself as hostage."

"Whom do you mean?" "The Count Frederick, sire." "Again the Count Frederick! He is a man of war, and his affairs are not to be trifled with. The annoyance in the king's face was unmistakable.

"He has been much concerned in my own."

"How, mademoiselle?" "I must explain? Sire, I came to your country only in my professional capacity—I had no more urgent errand than to find the half of a certain missing coin. The other half had come into my possession by chance. It was my fancy—"

"What, a broken coin? You interest me. Mademoiselle, I felt from the first moment that eventually we would find some common ground of interest. A coin—a broken coin—I know of some such thing myself. There are current stories about it. See, I have it, for my good friend Frederick seems for some strange reason to have a fancy for it himself. Would you like, then, to see it?"

Kitty's eyes flashed in eagerness. "Above all things, sire! It would complete my happiness to see it."

"Then you shall, assuredly." He bowed in somewhat adipsose gallantry as she extended her hand toward the pudgy palm in which lay the object which for her held such interest. In a glance she saw the identity of the missing half. The remaining words of the inscription—they were there, she was sure. "Torture chamber—treasures of the king." It was plain to her. These two pieces of metal joined would represent a story worth the having.

"Do you not desire it, then?" The voice of the monarch carried a certain reproach.

"Desire it, your majesty! I should desire nothing so much in all the world. With both halves in my hand—sire, I should feel that the world was mine."

"Why not gratify that wish then, mademoiselle? Listen. Count Frederick desired this very trinket—for a lady, he said. Here is a lady who desires it for herself. Why should we not give it her—why should we not have right as good as his?"

"You cannot mean it for me?" "But yes, precisely! And listen, my dear young lady. There is something about this broken coin which begins to annoy me. Count Frederick is always referring to it for one reason or another—he has some motive which I cannot divine. Now, of late I have had abundant troubles, many persons who importune me. In these serious times, the people being of more importance, we have matters of more importance than to trifle with this trinket, as I say. You desire it. It bores me. Who better than yourself should own it if you like?"

Kitty stood looking at him, scarce believing what he said. King Michael went on:

"Two things interest me today, my dear lady. First, how to quiet my people; the second, to discover some fashion which shall keep you here in our own country, interested and useful. I am convinced of your own wisdom, your own justice—your own experience in your land as to law and liberty and justice. Sometimes out of the mouth of a woman—a lady of rank, of experience—one might learn the better how to carry on the duties of a state."

"And the duties of the state would

dispose your majesty wholly to the good of his people?"

"Precisely. It is as I would have said it, mademoiselle. You Americans are extraordinary."

Kitty took from his hand the broken bit of metal and regarded it thoughtfully.

"I thank you more than I can tell, your majesty," said she, soberly. "It shall be my mission to find out for your people the uncompleted message of this coin."

A silver bell sounded afar in the hall, announcing the approach of a servant. An official of the palace entered and stood motionless near the door.

"What then, Andreas?" "The Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen, the Count Sachio of Grabaffen."

"Let them enter, Andreas." Both gentlemen bowed deeply as they entered and each kissed the royal hand respectfully. Kitty ignored Count Sachio and bowed but coldly to Count Frederick.

Count Frederick, in whose mind seemed to linger but scant remembrance of any unpleasant scenes in which he had figured, smiled now, and after the American fashion, as he fancied, held out his hand.

Kitty could not refuse it. Quickly she shifted the broken bit of coin from her right hand to her left—quickly, but not so quickly as to escape the keen eyes of the man who faced her now.

"Count Sachio, you are welcome from your kingdom to ours. I believe you have never heard of the young American of distinction who has come among us of late—you have not met?"

Kitty looked calmly at the count and made no reply.

"Pas encore, votre majeste," replied Sachio in the common language used

at court with strangers present. "Not yet." His face flushed deeply as he lied.

"Ah, very well, then it is time. At the hall perhaps we shall all be present. Mademoiselle, your invitation shall come to us duly."

Kitty took this to be her dismissal, and with deep thanks and the best curtsy she could muster, bowed herself from the room, after to be escorted by a grave official to her car.

CHAPTER XII.

Before the Ball.

In her hotel, albeit something of a subject of gossip, as she herself could not but know, Kitty felt herself at least safe from any such occurrences as of late had been her lot. Roleau still was missing.

It was the morning of the great black and white ball when Kitty, her gown finally in her own possession, stood before the tall mirror in her rooms to give it its final proving.

The case on her dressing table now held but a few simple rings and brooches, trifling things which had been given her or which from time to time she had purchased for herself.

The only thing of value which lay upon the table was something which she most wished to conceal, and not to display. The broken coin—how could she make sure that it would be safe?

Kitty swiftly conceived a plan which she fancied would afford greater safety for the cherished coin. There was at hand no machinery of ceremony, even had she been familiar with it.

"The simplest way is the best," said she to herself, her lips compressed.

She sat at her desk and inclosed the broken coin in a double sheet of paper. Upon one sheet she wrote these few words:

"Your Majesty, the young American woman so honored with this gift asks its safekeeping for a little time."

She added no signature, but on the envelope—the best the Hotel Ritz could furnish her—she wrote a simple address: "For the King, at the Royal Palace, to be delivered at twelve midnight promptly."

In fault of better messenger, Kitty telephoned now to the bureau of telegraphs and asked for a reliable messenger. When presently he came she entrusted this missive to him with express instructions that he should leave it in the hands of some chosen servant of the king who would be sure to deliver it at the hour of midnight that very day.

The man listened respectfully, took the missive, and started for the door. Passing, he almost ran against a gentleman in the hall, and dropped his envelope as he did so.

"Your pardon," exclaimed the gentleman, raising his hat; and himself picked up the envelope. The messenger did not notice his fingers quickly closing upon it, feeling it here and there as he presented it to the bearer.

Relieved now of this care, and satisfied that her plan would provide for the safety of this prized possession for that night at least—Kitty passed on to other matters.

Of what use, after all, was half this coin, while the Count Frederick still retained the other half—taken from her by force, by violence? She stood for a time, her fingers at her lips, engaged in thought. "I am going direct to Count Frederick himself and ask him for the other half of the coin. He knows the king has given me his half—perhaps he will relent and let me match the king's half of the Gretzhoffen coin."

With her to think was to act. A half hour later, ready robed for the street, she was in her car and on her way to the palace of Count Frederick.

They knew her at the count's palace now—or thought they knew her—and so no questions were asked when she applied at the door. Pending the coming of the count, who was at home, as she learned, she was shown to a reception room close to the entry door.

As she sat here, she heard footsteps approaching, heard voices in conversation. She knew that Count Frederick was there, but not alone.

Kitty listened shamelessly—for now indeed all was fair in war for her in case like this.

She heard Count Frederick address his companion as "My Lord Minister," and again as "Danislaw," so knew that it was none other than the prime minister of Gretzhoffen with whom he was conversing.

"My friend," she heard a hard, incisive voice declare, "this ball tonight is the crowning mistake of the entire year. It may mean the ruin of Gretzhoffen. I tell you, Count Frederick, revolution is in the air. The people are demanding the answer to all their sufferings, to their poverty, their anxieties. That answer, if we do not use every means to change it, surely will be written red!"

"But what plan do you propose, my lord minister? What can I do?" "One thing! Let me be blunt and brief—have the king sober tonight! I shame to say those words—but those are my words to you. Have our monarch—whom we reverence—sober tonight! If the people see him drunken, if they find him careless, indifferent, in times like this—pouf!—revolution. I tell you, and the answer written with the pen of blood."

Count Frederick apparently paused at this. There was a hint of something suppressed in his voice when at length he did reply.

"My lord minister, I'll see the king!" Kitty thought that now they clasped hands. She heard the prime minister departing, each giving the other formal words of courtesy.

Now she heard Frederick calling to his servants. "Rubinoff, Franko—any of you rascals—well, you, Rubinoff. Go at once to the apartments of the Count Sachio and ask him if he will join me at once."

Kitty, still trembling in suppressed excitement, waited yet longer before declaring herself. She heard Frederick pacing up and down in the room, muttering to himself—heard also after an interminable interval the footsteps of another in the hall—heard Frederick greet him.

"Ah, Sachio, you are welcome indeed. We have news for you, my friend—news that may go well with our plans."

"Command me, my dear Frederick." "I ask you, my dear Sachio, to do an easy, pleasant and interesting task. It is no more than to go this afternoon, to win in some fashion into the presence of King Michael the Second, our beloved monarch—whom we both reverence!—and then and there, by what means shall seem most expedient, to induce him to drink more wine than ever he did in one day in his life."

Count Sachio laughed loud and long. "For what purpose, my good Frederick?" he inquired at length.

"For a plain and definite purpose! Listen. As you know, I have had my eyes on the throne of Gretzhoffen since the death of the old king. That throne is rightfully mine, and will be mine. This land is full of discontent—like your own, yonder. The people complain. They are on the very verge of revolution at this moment. This great ball tonight—the thought of its expense has enraged our people. Now, if tonight they see our beloved monarch—whom we both reverence—in his usual or more than his usual state of intoxication—then there's the match to the powder mill. The revolution is begun. The explosion is made. It will be too late, then. Their wrath against the weak Michael—disappointed, wasting their substance for them—will be unappeasable. For the rest



At the Black and White Ball

"I have made my plans. My own regiments will be faithful. The regiments of the king are none too faithful. The banditti of the desert are with us. Tomorrow there will be a new king in Gretzhoffen, and that king will be—Frederick the First."

Kitty slipped from the room. The hall was empty. An instant later she was out of the great entry and passing to her car.

At her hotel once more she hurried to her room. Here was something to be done. She knew the plot now—all was plain as to the intentions of Frederick in regard to the kingdom of Gretzhoffen and to the monarch who held the throne.

"Your majesty," she wrote in her rolling hand now, "the young American so much honored by your gift— which is returned to your care at midnight tonight—has by chance learned of a plot to injure your majesty and to injure the kingdom of Gretzhoffen as well. Trust her to explain when opportunity shall come. Meantime have your safety. Drink no wine. Beware."

Once more she telephoned to the bureau of telegraphs, called for a messenger, and sent her simple missive to the king.

CHAPTER XIII.

A Prisoner. Having dispatched her messages, Kitty Gray sat alone once more in her room. There came to her mind once more the reflection that now she had not even one portion of the broken coin. As to that which had gone to the king, she felt fairly sure that she might regain it. As to that which had been taken from her by force by Count Frederick, she was far as ever from its possession.

"The simplest way is the best," said she once more. "I'll go back there again."

"I was not so fortunate as to find monsieur the count at home before," she explained to the attendants who met her at the door.

"Monsieur the count has gone out but now."

A sudden resolution came to Kitty's mind even as a sudden flush came to her cheek.

"So? Then I will wait his coming. If you please, the apartments of monsieur the count."

The man led her, and she closed the door. An instant later she was at work turning over the articles on the dresser, peering here and there, looking in this way and that—and unsuccessfully.

But meantime the attendant who had left her, anxious to be of service to his master, sent out posthaste to summon Count Frederick to his return. He met the count himself, and yet another attendant, upon the point of entering the palace. The newcomer was talking to the count excitedly.

"Excellency, I tell you the woman is outwitting you. She sent her half the coin this very morning—sent it to the king by special messenger. I saw it—I felt it in the envelope, I am sure. There is some plot afoot. And I brought the news as soon as possible, but have searched for you long."

"Come," said Frederick, and he hastened the more when he met the messenger advising him of Kitty's presence in the palace.

Her search still uncompleted, Kitty heard footsteps approaching, and turned desperately like some trapped animal. There was no escape—the narrow window, as she knew, was two stories above the court below. And even as she stepped to the door she met there the smiling, sardonic face of Count Frederick himself.

"The honor is mine, mademoiselle!" said he with icy politeness. "True, I had not expected you."

Shamefaced, confused, for once unable to make any explanation, Kitty could but stand and stare at him. An instant later she heard the click of the lock and the passing of footsteps in the hall once more. She was alone! She was a prisoner!

She sat alone, helpless, unanswered in spite of her pounding on the door, her cries for help, until she was utterly weary—until the shades of night came.

She looked at her watch. The hour was approaching eleven. The great black and white ball was now in progress at the winter palace across the city.

She went to the window and looked out into the night. All the court was dark—save one window directly below her on the opposite side, fifteen feet below, ten feet across the narrow courtyard. Even as she looked down

at it she saw a face thrust out—a face upturned towards her.

"Roleau!" she exclaimed. "Can it be possible? Roleau, help me!" Kitty extended her arms appealingly. "I am a prisoner here—they have locked me in—there is no way out. Help me!"

Roleau's own presence in the palace she did not at the moment undertake to explain. As a matter of fact, he had but that day come in from the camp of the banditti, where he had been detained.

"Wait," he cried. "I will show you." An iron grating, with the stairs of a fire escape, led down directly in front of Roleau's window. He came out upon this, braced his legs across, and back under the rail, and held out his mighty arms.

"Jump," he cried. "It is safe." An instant later she was on the iron grating and into the window, and Roleau, gaunt, unshaven, smiling, her friend and rescuer, had led her to the door.

"Come," he said, and without pausing for any discussion, he hurried out, she following.

"It is late, Roleau," whispered Kitty back to him. "It is eleven o'clock. The king goes to the great ball at midnight. Hurry, I must be there. Quick!"

CHAPTER XIV.

The Ballroom. In his own apartments that evening Michael the king had passed the time in somewhat preoccupied fashion. Left alone, and hence unhappy in his counsels, he welcomed the announcement of the chamberlain who advised him of the presence of the Count Sachio of Grabaffen, who wished to pay his compliments to the king.

"Come then, my dear count," said Michael to him. "You are very welcome at this hour. You will have a glass of our own vintage—I have a cask of Lucoyen which is quite worth while."

"With all my heart," said Count Sachio.

The attendant removed the cork from the bottle reverently, poured slowly, gently, the amber fluid into the tall glasses upon the table. It was at that moment that King Michael beheld him of a certain message handed to him but left until now unopened. He frowned as he looked at the word, irrelevant when addressed to royalty, and urging haste. "Important! Is it so? What shall I do, my dear count? Throw it away?"

Count Sachio cast a glance upon the inscription.

"Your majesty," said he, "it is in the hand of a lady. By no means throw away any letter a woman writes to you—and by no means write one yourself. Am I not good counsel?"

Smiling, King Michael broke open the small hotel seal, frowning as he did so at what seemed to him undue familiarity on the part of someone, he knew not who. But as his eyes ran over the few lines of the message his expression suddenly changed. The words remained deeply written on his mind. "Your majesty . . . young American . . . drink no wine."

Count Sachio looked on respectfully, his glass arrested, naturally venturing no comment. King Michael made no effort to turn the conversation. He left his wine untasted!

"Indeed, our people also are growing in audacity," went on Count Sachio presently. "But I pledge your majesty a long and happy reign." He raised his glass and waited.

"Drink heartily, good Count Sachio," said King Michael. "As for myself, I have dined but lately, as I said, the doctors say dreadful things to me. You excuse me?"

He had poured but a small portion in his own glass, and raised his hand against more.

Sachio was obliged to admit to Count Frederick, whom now he early sought, that he doubted the full success of his errand.

"Leave him then to me," exclaimed Frederick—"he never fails to do as I ask. Make ready for the ball—time presses now. I myself will hasten to see the king before he leaves for the winter palace."

Frederick, making urgent excuses now to enter the apartments of the king after his arrival, found the monarch in the same apartment, stolidly regarding the now empty bottle of wine.

A certain idea came to the brain of Michael, the king, as he now acknowledged the visit of Count Frederick at so late an hour. If this message had warned him not to drink wine—then there must be someone in

the world who wished him to drink wine. Why? Who was that person? Might it not be this man here—Count Frederick—the man whom really he feared? If so, would not feigned intoxication serve well to discover the other's nature?

Reasoning thus, King Michael with small exertion of histrionic art managed to give an excellent imitation to his friend of a monarch far gone in wine. Frederick, pleading fatigue and thirst, plied him farther, and Michael apparently yielded, using still such arts as served him for the time being.

When, not too long before the appointed hour of midnight, Frederick left the palace, he left behind him as he was assured, a monarch hopelessly fuddled.

So the lights flamed on at all the windows of the Winter palace.

Suddenly the music broke, crashed and swept into the national air. A murmur went about! The king! The dancers hastened back to the sides of the room. All eyes turned toward the great entrance.

Under the festooned flags, escorted by his uniformed officers, himself wearing all his decorations and garbed as a king should be, there appeared King Michael of Gretzhoffen.

The hour of midnight struck. The eyes of more than one man on the great dancing floor—including those of Count Frederick of Gretzhoffen—looked at the king amazed. Here was no staggering monarch, maddled in his cups, come to make a spectacle of himself before his people. No, he walked straight as any. And behind him from the street there came not shouts of derision, but something of welcome, of confidence—a pitiful expression of a people willing yet longer to endure a king.

At the king's side, her hand on his arm, there walked the figure of a tall and beautiful woman, arrayed—as were all those others present—in a costume of black and white—a tall young woman whom not many of those present recognized. A few passed the word, "The American!"

The music of the royal anthem ceased. An instant and the orchestra broke out once more in the staccato strains of a southern waltz. King Michael as yet did not dance, but he gave word that the ball should proceed. A uniformed officer of the court now approached Count Frederick as he stood not far removed from the royal presence.

"Monsieur, the count," said he deferentially, "I have had for some hours in my possession this package which I have not opened. It is marked to be presented to his majesty at midnight here. Do you think it should be delivered?"

Even as they spoke the king himself, accompanied, in accordance with his request, by the young woman who

had entered with him, approached Count Frederick. He raised a hand to beckon to the official.

"Your majesty," whispered Kitty Gray, "that is the package which I myself sent you this morning—take it quickly—I marked it for you at midnight."

"Shall I open it for your majesty?" Count Frederick bent forward politely.

"No," said Michael. "I know the one who sent it. Let herself open it now!"

Kitty broke the simple seal upon the plain envelope in which she had enclosed the coin that morning. She smiled at Michael radiantly now, and at Count Frederick, though not radiantly.

The dance swept on, the crash of red and brass filling the arched dome of the great salon. In through the great doors came the cries of those who stood without the palace—"Long live the king!"

But the king stood curiously regarding the change in expression which he saw on the face of the young American.

"Well, then, mademoiselle!" said he (TO BE CONTINUED.)

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