

FLASH FICTION

The Coin

by Daniel Loebel



"Give Yourself to the Air" by Karen Fitzgerald

Like all good stories, this one starts at the beach. I was wandering the shore at sunrise when I saw something glinting in the sand, near where the edge of the waves melted into foam. I reached down and picked up a coin. A round gold doubloon with a self-satisfied king's face on one side and a beautiful shield on the other, indicating 1798.

I fought the temptation to bite it to prove its value. I rinsed it in the foamy water from the nearest wave.

I looked around to catch anyone who could take it away from me. Perhaps some of the men and women who fought on sailing ships, cannons firing, and with swords at the ready, prepared to die to get at this coin and its brothers and sisters. In their time, they made coveting the coin's golden sparkle their life's purpose. A prize for men and women without families. They loved to own it. Perhaps never to use it at all but simply stare at it under the glow of a candle in a moonlit cave somewhere on an isolated island where others could not get at their treasure. Perhaps they loved to hold many coins in their hands and get drunk on their shine and lovely colors, thinking of the rewards of a day well spent.

I put the coin in my pocket and walked on. The air was saline. A man was warming up before his morning swim. A pair of women stood in the sand dressed in white robes doing Tai-Chi, their hands artfully curved like crane's necks. A pair of lovers walked close together, the man's plastic sandals dangling from his right hand. The woman was a slim sail in the wind, her long hair drifting in the breeze. The water sparkled in the light. More coins coming to the surface?

The gold dealer was a short man with no hair and a soft manner. He wore a green vest over a white shirt. I put the coin on the counter between us and told him when and where I found it. He picked it up and took it to the room behind the counter, where he applied a magnet test, followed by acid tests and several other methods needed to make sure it was real.

I waited by the counter. A young woman brought me an unrequested cup of coffee. Her smile was pleasant and welcoming.

Eventually, the gold dealer returned and put the coin on the counter, freshly cleaned and wiped of all testing residue.

It's worth 50 bucks, he said. I'll give you cash right now...

He looked at me and waited.

The coin on the counter looked plain under the clinical white lights. There was no life in it. The weight of the city noise pressed every bit of the beach out of it.

I breathed out and let a long breath in.

No, I said with a smile. I'll keep it as it is today.

The gold dealer shrugged and immediately went on to the next customer.

I put the coin in my pocket, its real weight hitting my hip, and walked out into the late afternoon sun to join the current of people on the sidewalk.