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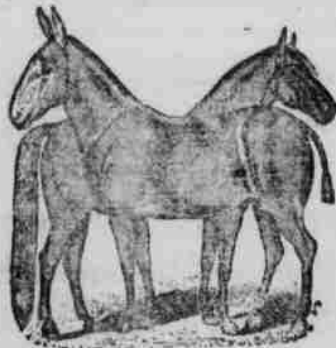
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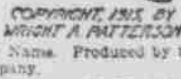
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By EMERSON HOUGH

From the Scenario by
GRACE CUNARD



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Novelized From the Motion Picture Drama of the Same Name. Produced by the
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loll many duties unperformed—I still miss the young American, who should be here to lighten the cares of the heavy hours. Yet you come—late our story, now our friend. What can we do for you, Sachio, to show our gratitude for your faithfulness?

SYNOPSIS.

NINETEENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER LXVIII.

Count Sachio's Search.

"Your majesty, I can now assure you of our success."

Count Sachio of Grotzhoften spoke calmly. On his face was written full conviction of the truth of his words.

He stood once more with his monarch in the great hall of the palace of Grotzhoften, whither he had hastened at once on his return from the rival capital.

"Why, Sachio?" demanded Cortislaw. "What reason have you to believe our success nearer than it has been any time these months past?"

"Your majesty asks proof? Look!"

Sachio held out in his hand the two halves, or what purported to be the two halves, of the broken coin of Grotzhoften. He, indeed, supposed them to be both halves of that mysterious coin, although in truth one was only the counterfeit long since devised by Count Frederick to appease his own king. That Michael of Grotzhoften had missed his former possession—that Kitty Gray still held one half of the actual coin—neither Sachio nor his king knew.

Both companions bent above the bits of metal and with united in consultation. Their arduous search seemed now ready to approach its end.

"By my faith, Sachio," exclaimed Cortislaw, "it seems indeed we have but to run the trail hard and fast a trifle further."

"Yes, your majesty, it remains only for your servant—your very faithful servant, may I say it—to find the hiding place of the script and treasures themselves."

"That is a necessary detail," said Cortislaw, with a cold grin. "I have fed long enough on maps and legends and scripts—now I would dip my hands in actual mintage of gold coins."

"I would see the light of your own shining, and not this false light which we have followed so long over the morasses of doubt and uncertainty. Success! Success! Sachio—in real coin, in real gold, in real treasure—that success alone can mean anything to you or me."

"Be it so, your majesty!" said Sachio, with no abatement of his confidence. "I take my chances. I stake my life on the hazard of full success. If I find not the hidden treasure of Grotzhoften, then bring my head on our walls as a warning to all boasters."

"Go, then," said the king coldly. "You have found your way within the gates before—do so again. Search deeply—under the walls of the treasure chamber, perhaps the safe says—the treasure's hiding place lies deep under the walls—but precisely where is that?"

Always the king's cautious mind carried him into the doubts and difficulties of any case.

"It must be somewhere below and beyond the galleries which they flooded from the moats when they came near drowning all our troops," replied Sachio. "I know those galleries as I do my own bedchamber. Trust me to run out this puzzle to which we now have the key here in my hand. When I do, I shall dip my hands deep in actual mintage of gold coin."

"You will do nothing of the kind," Sachio said his monarch. "You will receive that first right for your king."

Sachio flushed red, but bowed, conscious of the soft rivalry of spirits who parcel unholy gain.

"True, your majesty," said he. "I spoke but in jest. The ruler right in my such judgment as this is always, of course, that of the king. The right and the promises of the monarch who has led us to such success as this is a thing common to all others. But what shall be my course to your majesty, once I have found the actual hiding place?"

"Agreed," said Cortislaw, and turned to gnaw his beard in the impatience of a man long balked of his most intimate desire.

And Sachio hastened, he that said for him. His swiftest ear carried him across the devious way that lay between the two kingdoms, and duly he arrived at the door of the palace of Grotzhoften. Here his acquaintance with the place and his ready reference of all inquirers to the king himself gained him easy access once more.

Michael, the wren, still dwelt in the palace, giving small care to the ruin and disorder which lay about him on all sides. Let others care for the government, let others make good the breaches in the capital's defense, let others reorganize the scattered forces of the army. Himself, he was content to continue his revelry in the palace with those who cared to join him, male or female, creatures dissolute as himself, who had clung to him intimately in hope of possible reward at some later time.

Before this ruler Count Sachio of Grotzhoften presently bowed humbly, professing his friendship, giving no token of his treacherous errand.

"What, again, friend Sachio of Grotzhoften?" joked Michael when he saw him. "You have become one of our most faithful subjects, is it not so? I still miss Count Frederick, who has

With her gone, we have no hope remaining—we never shall find it ourselves. She alone now could save my life—she whom I mistreated—and she whom I sent away."

"And Count Frederick," he went on, still musing to himself. "He was my enemy, and is today—but something tells me that he also has the clue. If he were here, I could wheedle or threaten him. Perhaps he is with her; who knows? And I have sent her away! Did ever a man gain sight by bullying a woman? Fair speech with them—or the bowstring—those are the only ways. I am sentenced, doomed, and by my own fault."

Discouraged, baffled, perhaps after all, affected by the gloom of these surroundings, he turned back at last. Somewhere near him he knew, somewhere perhaps not a biscuit toss away, measured by distance in the open air, lay a dark cloistered space, the chamber of tortures, grim in its secrets, its floor perhaps piled with broken bones, its walls perhaps hung full of the old machinery for parting flesh and soul in lingering agony. Was it indeed true that the lost souls in that hidden chamber had wiped out the trace of it and left the surface of all these walls alike?

Count Sachio could feel the needles and pinners of hot steel tearing at his own soul.

"Gone!" said he, to himself, "gone! And 'twas I who sent her away."

CHAPTER LXIX.

The Sacred Fire.

No intimation could come to anyone in the two rival kingdoms as to the whereabouts of those two persons of most importance in the swift drama of those days—Kitty and Count Frederick. They had disappeared utterly and left no trace. With them had passed all hope of the solution of the

in one swift stroke at the hand of his monarch, moved by the frenzy of his disappointment? Or would it come in the slow torture of deliberate revenge, wrought on him for that failure in the Finnish ingenuity of the icy soul of Cortislaw?

"I have failed," said Sachio to himself, "and through my own fault! I had success in my grasp and threw it away. That girl could have told me everything, and I sent her away—beyond all reach—out of our country!"

Sachio was an alert and active soul. His was no haphazard intellect, apt to accept the dictum of a mind less exact than his own. He was a soldier first, and next a diplomat, but all the time a model secret agent, a typical spy and detective. He now set about the business in hand, deliberately, with precision, methodically, so that he need not do any task a second time.

He himself had sketched a rough map of the lower galleries as he fancied them to lie. He calculated now that with the aid of this chart and his own earlier acquaintance with these subterranean chambers, it would be easy to find the last door that lay between him and the buried treasure of Grotzhoften.

What scenes of horror these places must have held Sachio did not pause to ask. That souls had passed out there through these cold walls of stone, that human flesh had quivered here in torment and human voices broken in their anguish, meant naught to him. A king had seen fit to surround his treasures with such terrors in order to fence away all intruders. He had buried these treasures under the very floor of his torture chamber so that all might fear to intrude there in their search. Some might be deterred by such fears—but not Sachio of Grotzhoften. He walked on calmly, unmoved, sure that his own persistence, his own cunning, had defeated the purpose of the dead king, whose methods so long had defied the avarice and greed of those two kingdoms.

Sachio lost little time in the earlier portions of the subterranean galleries and satisfied himself only that he was not being pursued. Soon he arrived upon the lower levels, where he did not expect to meet disturbance. Now came the crux of his search.

He made his way slowly along the darkened channels carved at some unknown day from the granite rock on which stood the Grotzhoften castle, tried door after door, and entered chamber after chamber, slowly, methodically, with no enthusiasm, but only the air of a man covering all possible mischances in his search.

He looked most carefully in that portion of the vaults where he had found the half of the torn parchment, but got no further trace of the missing portion. This gave him a certain answer, for he had figured that the broken coin and the broken parchment would correlate, would focus, somewhere nearly at the same point. But the stained and mildewed walls, still damp from their recent floodings, gave him but cold encouragement whichever way he turned. Any soul but his would have felt the chill of such environment.

"So," said he to himself, standing irresolute at last, and finding himself unable to decide what next to do. "My map has the misfortune of having been made from the imagination and not from facts in hand. But now—see, here the way forks."

Before him now lay a series of galleries still damp from the recent flooding from the moat. It was Sachio's theory, based upon he knew not what, that the treasure chamber must lie somewhere under the moat, that the flood gates must have been devised for some purpose of protecting it. He acted upon that theory now, and with no better guide than the greater dampness of the rock floors which he followed, he wandered on hour after hour.

At length he paused, helpless, puzzled, dumfounded. He had taken a wrong turn somewhere in this labyrinth of underground channels! He had not even found the water gates which had flooded these levels so recently. He had found no new recesses in the rocky walls. He had found nothing which in the least compared itself with the map he now held in his hand! The cold sweat broke out upon his forehead even in these

Yes, Sachio had failed. He knew what that meant. Death was to be his portion for his failure. Would it come



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