

The GOOSE GIRL

By HAROLD MacGRATH

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He had crowded him against a wall two or three days before. The vintner turned back the lid of his stein and drank slowly. Carmichael sat down. Now, this vintner's face was something familiar. Carmichael stirred his memory. It was not in Dreberg that he had seen him before. But where? Gretchen arrived with the tankard, which she set down at Carmichael's elbow. "Will you not join me, herr?" he invited. "Thank you," said the vintner. Gretchen took up the empty tankard and made off. Carmichael was first to speak. "She is the handsomest peasant I ever saw or knew." "You know her? There was a spark in the vintner's eyes. "Only for a few days. She interests me," Carmichael produced a pipe and lighted it. "Ah, yes; the pretty peasant girl always interests you gentlemen." There was a note of bitterness. "Did you come here to seek her?" "You seem to possess a peculiar interest."

The old man in tatters sat erect in his chair. "You have served?" "A little. If I could be an officer I should like the army." The vintner reached for his pipe, which lay on the table. "Try this," urged Carmichael, offering his pouch. "This will be good tobacco, I know." The vintner filled his pipe. Carmichael followed this gift with many questions about wines and vineyards, and hidden in these questions were a dozen clever traps. But the other walked over them unhesitant, with a certainty of step which charmed the trapper. By and by the vintner rose and bade his table companion a good night. He had not offered to buy anything. This frugality was purely of the thrifty peasant. But the vintner expressed many thanks. On his way to the door he stopped and whispered into Gretchen's ear. The press in the room was thinning. A carter sauntered past and sat down unobtrusively at the table occupied by the old man, whose face Carmichael had not yet seen. A little later a butcher approached the same table and seated himself. It was then a dusty baker came along and repeated this procedure, and Carmichael's curiosity was enlivened. Undoubtedly they were Socialists, and this was a little enclave, and the peculiar manner of their meeting, the silence and mystery, were purely accidental. Had Carmichael not fallen a-dreaming over his pipe he would have seen the old man pass three slips of paper across the table. He would have seen the carter, the butcher and the baker pocket these slips stolidly. He would have seen the mountaineer wave his hand sharply and the trio rise and disperse. Carmichael left the Black Eagle, nursing the smoken ember in his pipe. Immediately the mountaineer paid his score and started for the stairs which led to the bedrooms above. But he stopped at the bar. A very old man was having a pail filled with hot cabbage soup. It was the ancient clock mender across the way. The mountaineer was startled out of his habitual reserve. The clock mender had the aspect of a weary, broken man. He shuffled noiselessly out. The mountaineer followed him cautiously. Once in his shop the clock mender poured the steaming soup into a bowl, broke bread in it and began his evening meal. The other, his face pressed against the dim pane, stared and stared. "Gott in himmel! It is he!" he gasped chokingly.

Krumerweg was indeed a crooked way. It formed a dozen elbows and ragged half circles as it slunk off from the Adlergasse. It was half after 9 when Gretchen and the vintner picked their way over cobbles pitted here and there with mudholes. They were arm in arm. "Only a little farther," said Gretchen, for the vintner had never before passed over this way. "Long as it is and crooked, heaven knows it is short enough!" He encircled her with his arms and kissed her. "I love you! I love you!" he said. Her bosom swelled, her heart throbbed, and she breathed in ecstasy the sweet chill air that rushed through the broken street. "After the vintage," she said, giving his arm a pressure. For this handsome fellow was to be her husband when the vines were pruned and freshened against the coming winter. "Aye, after the vintage," he echoed. But there was tragedy in his heart as deep and profound as his love. "My grandmother—I call her that, for I haven't any grandmother—is old and seldom leaves the house. I promised that after work tonight I'd bring my man home and let her see how handsome he is. She is always saying that we need a man about, and yet I can do a man's work as well as the next one. I love you, too, Leo!" She pulled his hand to her lips and quickly kissed it, frightened but unashamed. "Gretchen, Gretchen!" She stopped. "What is it?" keenly. "There was pain in your voice." "The thought of how I love you hurts me. There is nothing else, nothing, neither riches nor crowns, nothing but you, Gretchen." They proceeded until they came to



"I DO NOT WISH ANY QUARREL, MY CAPTAIN."

the end of their journey at No. 44 in the Krumerweg. It was a house of hanging gables, almost as old as the town itself. Frau Schwarz, Gretchen's grandmother, owned the house. It was all that berried her from poverty's wolves, and, what with sundry taxes and repairs and tenants who paid infrequently, it was little enough. Gretchen opened the door, which was unlocked. There was no light in the hall. She pressed her lever in her armpit, kissed him lightly and pushed him into the living room. Gretchen ran forward, lighted two candles, then kissed the old woman seated in the one comfortable chair. "Here I am, grandmother!" "And who is with you?" "My man!" cried Gretchen gayly. "Bring him near me." Gretchen gathered up two stools and placed them on either side of her grandmother and motioned to the vintner to sit down. "Where are you from? You are not a Dreberg, is the old woman asked. "From the north, grandmother." "Your name." "Leopold Dietrich, a vintner by trade." "Give me your hand." The vintner looked surprised for a moment. Gretchen approved. So he gave the old woman his left hand. The grandmother smoothed it out upon her own and bent her shrewd eyes. A frown began to gather on the vintner's brow and a sweat in his palm. "I see many strange things here," said the palmist in a brooding tone. "What do you see?" asked Gretchen. "I see very little of vineyards. I see riches. I see vast armies moving against each other; powder and fire; devastation. I do not see you, young man, among those who tramp with guns on their shoulders. You ride. There is gold on your arms. You will become great. But I do not understand." "War!" he murmured. Gretchen's heart sank. "Shall I live?" asked the vintner. "There is nothing here save death in old age, vintner." Her gnarled hand seized his in a vise. "What do you mean by my girl?" "Grandmother!" Gretchen remonstrated. The vintner withdrew his hand slowly. "Is this the hand of a liar and a cheat? Is it the hand of a dishonest man?" "There is no dishonesty there, but there are lines I do not understand. It is like seeing people in a mist. They pass instantly and disappear. But I repeat, do you mean well by my girl?" "Before God and his angels I love her; before all mankind I would gladly declare it. Gretchen shall never come to harm at these hands. I swear it." "I believe you." The old woman's form relaxed its tenseness. There was a sound outside. A carriage had stopped. Some one opened the door and began to climb the stairs. "There is something strange going on up there," said Gretchen in a whisper. "Three times a veiled lady has called at night on a sick lodger; three times a man muffled up so one could not see his face." "Let us not question our 20 crowns rent, Gretchen," interrupted the grandmother. "So long as no one is disturbed, so long as the police are not brought to our door, it is not our affair." The vintner picked up his hat, and Gretchen led him to the street. He hurried away, giving no glance at the closed carriage, the sleepy driver, the weary horse. Neither did he heed the man dressed as a carter who, when he saw the vintner, turned and followed. Finally when the vintner veered into the Adlergasse he stopped, his hands clinched, his teeth hard upon each other. He even leaned against the wall of a house, his face for the moment hidden in his arm. "Wretch that I am! Damnable wretch! Krumerweg, Krumerweg! Crooked way, indeed!" He flung down his arm passionately. "There will be a God up yonder," looking at the

know that it is not bad, only young Oh, Gretchen!" "Gretchen?" The carter stepped into a shadow and waited. Carmichael did not enjoy the opera that night. He had missed the first acts, and the last was growsome, and the royal box was vacant. Outside he sat down on one of the benches near the fountains in the Platz. He left the bench and strolled around the fountain, his cane behind his back, his chin in his collar. "Just a moment, my studious friend," he was saluted. "Wallenstein! I didn't see you." Carmichael halted. "I'm absentminded," Carmichael admitted. "Not always, my friend. Now, I do not believe that it was absentmindedness which made you step in between me and that pretty goose girl the other night." "Ah!" Carmichael was all alertness. "It was not, I believe?" "It was coldly premeditated," said Carmichael, folding his arms over his cane, which he still held behind his back. "But that happens to be an innocent girl, colonel. You're no Herod. You really annoyed her." "Pretense. They always begin that way. I do not wish any quarrel, my captain. But that girl's face has fascinated me. I propose to see her as often as I like." "I have no objection to offer. But I told Gretchen that if any one, no matter who, ever offers her disrespect to report the matter to me at the consulate." "Well, in case she is what you consider insulted what will you do?" a challenge in his tones. "Report the matter to the police." Wallenstein laughed. "And if the girl finds no redress there," tranquilly, "to the chancellor." The colonel laughed harshly and strode abruptly away. Carmichael saw a carriage coming along. He recognized the white horse as it passed the lamps. He stood still for a space, undecided. Then he sped rapidly toward the side gates of the royal gardens. The vehicle stopped there. But this time no woman came out. Carmichael would have recognized that hank form anywhere. It was the chancellor. Well, what of it? Couldn't the chancellor go out in a common hack if he wanted to? But who was the lady in the veil? As soon as the chancellor disappeared Carmichael hailed the coachman and engaged him for a drive for 3 crowns. Carmichael slid over to the forward seat and touched the Jehu on the back. "Where did you take the chancellor tonight?" he asked. "Du lieber Gott! Was that his excellency? He said he was the chief steward." "So he is, my friend. I was only jesting. Where did you take him?" "I took him to Krumerweg. He was there half an hour—No. 40." "Where did you take the veiled lady?" "The coachman drew in suddenly. "Herr, are you from the police?" "Thousand thunders, no! It was by accident that I stood near the gate when she got out. Who was she?" "That is better. They both told me that they were giving charity. She went into No. 40. You won't forget an extra crown, herr?" "No; I'll make it five. Turn back and leave me at the Grand hotel." On the return to the hotel the station omnibus had arrived with a solitary guest. "Your excellency," said the concierge, rubbing his hands, "a compatriot of yours arrived this evening." "What name?" indifferently. "He is Hans Grumbach of New York." "An adopted compatriot, it would seem. He'll probably be over to the consulate tomorrow to have his passports looked into. Good night." So Hans Grumbach passed out of his mind; but, for all that, fortune and opportunity were about to knock on Carmichael's door, for there was a great place in history ready for Hans Grumbach.

CHAPTER IV. AT THE BLACK EAGLE. HANS GRUMBACH was standing on the curb in front of the Grand hotel, his back to the sun. It was 9 o'clock. Hans was short, but strongly built—a mild, blue eyed German, smooth faced, ruddy cheeked, white haired, with a brown button of a nose. Presently two police officers came along and went into the hotel. Grumbach turned with a sigh and followed them. Doubtless they had come to look over his passports. And this happened to be the case. The senior officer unfolded the precious document. "It is not yet vised by your consul," said the officer. "I arrived late last night. I shall see him this morning," replied Grumbach. "You were not born in America?" "Oh, no; I came from Bavaria when twenty." "Did you go to America with your parents?" "No; I was alone." "What is your business in America?" "I am a plumber, now retired." "You are forty?" said the officer, referring to the passports. "Yes." "As soon as these are approved by his excellency the American consul kindly have a porter bring them over to the bureau of police. It will be only a matter of form. I shall return them at once." Grumbach produced a Louis Napoleon, which was then, as now, acceptable that side of the Rhine.

"I was captain of B troop in the same regiment. Hurrah! Work's over for the day. Come along with me, Grumbach, and we'll talk it over downstairs in the Black Eagle. You're a godsend. C troop! Hanged if the world doesn't move things about oldly. I was in the hospital myself after Gettysburg—a ball in the leg. And I've rheumatism even now when a damp spell comes." "So down to the tavern they went, and there they talked the battles over, sundry tankards interpolating. It was "Do you remember this?" and "Do you recall that?" with diagrams drawn in beer on the oaken table. "But there's one thing, my boy," said Carmichael, "the odds were on our side or we'd be fighting yet." "That we would." "But you're from this side of the water?" "Yes; went over when I was twenty-two. I'm from Bavaria." Grumbach circled the room. All the near tables were vacant. The Black Eagle was generally a lonely place till late in the afternoon. Grumbach touched the scar tenderly. Could he trust this man? Could he trust any one in the world? The impulse came to trust Carmichael, and he did not disregard it. "I was born in this very street," he whispered. "Here?" "Sh! Not so loud. Yes, in this very street. But if the police knew I wouldn't be worth that!" with a snap of the fingers. "But what does this all mean? Can I help you in any way?" "No; no one can help me." "But why come back?" "Who can say what a man will do? Don't question me. Let be. I have said too much already." "But your name?" Grumbach laughed unmusically. "Grumbach is as good as another. Listen. When I left Dreberg there was a reward of a thousand crowns for me dead or alive." Carmichael was plainly bewildered. "You were mad to return." "I know it. I couldn't help it. Oh, don't look like that! I never hurt anybody unless it was in battle"—naively. "Now, what has happened since I went away? I have dared to ask questions of no one?" Carmichael, strangely attracted and trustful of his questioner, gave him a brief summary of events, principal among which was the amazing restoration of the Princess Hildegarde. To describe the Princess Hildegarde was not only an easy task but a pleasant one to Carmichael. "So she is gentle and beautiful? Why not? Ah! You should have seen her mother. She was the most beautiful woman in all Germany, and she sang like one of those Italian nightingales. The king of Jugendheld wanted her, but she loved the grand duke. So the Princess Hildegarde has come back to her own? God is good!" "Well," said Carmichael, beckoning to the waitress and paying the score, "if any trouble arises send for me. You don't look like a man who has done anything very bad." He offered his hand again. Grumbach pressed it firmly, and there was a moisture in his eyes. Grumbach declined Carmichael's invitation to lunch and immediately sought his own room. Once there he closed the shutters and opened his battered trunk. From the false bottom he took out a small bundle. Mad fool that he had been! How many times had he gazed at these trinkets in these sixteen or more years! How many times had the talons of remorse gashed his MAD FOOL THAT HE HAD BEEN! Two little yellow shoes, like two butterflies; a little cloak trimmed with ermine, a golden locket shaped like a heart! Grumbach was very fond of music. There was nothing at the opera, so he decided to spend the earlier part of the evening in the public gardens. Subsequently he found himself standing beside a young vintner and his peasant sweetheart. Their hands secretly met and locked behind their backs. Grumbach sighed. He would always go his way alone. The girl turned her head. She loosened the vintner's hand. "Do not mind me, girl," said Grumbach, his face broadening. The girl laughed easily and without confusion. Her companion, however, flushed under his tan, and a scowl ran over his forehead. The band was playing "Les Huguenots," and the girl hummed the air. A hand was put upon Grumbach's shoulder authoritatively. The police officer who had examined his passports that morning stood at Grumbach's elbow. "Herr Grumbach," he said quietly, "his excellency the chancellor has directed me to bring you at once to the palace." "To the palace?" Grumbach's face was expressive of great astonishment. "My passports were wrong in some respect?" "Oh, no, herr. They were correct." Grumbach roused his mind energetically. "But whatever can the chancellor want of me?" "That is not my business. I was simply sent to find you. His excellency is always interested in German Americans."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]