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# The GOOSE GIRL

By HAROLD MacGRATH

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[CONTINUED.]

The two were embarrassed. The little cavalcade directed its course toward the city.

"You have not been riding of late," she said.

Then she had missed him. Carmichael's heart expanded.

"I have ridden the same as usual, your highness, only I have taken this road for a change."

"Ah!" She patted the glistening neck of her mare. So he had purposely tried to avoid her? Why? She stole a sly glance at him. Why were not kings molded in this form? All the kings she had met had something the matter with them—crooked legs, weak eyes, bald, young or old, and daft over gaming tables and opera dancers. And the one man among them all—at least she had been informed that the king of Jugendheit was all of a man—had politely declined.

"I am guilty of lese majesty," he suggested.

"I shall not lock you up," she said, and added under her breath, "as my good father would like to. Besides," she continued aloud, "I rather like to set the court by the ears. Ah, but I shall lead some king a merry life!" with a wicked gleam in her eyes.

"Frederick of Jugendheit?"

"Is it true that you have not heard yet? I have declined the honor."

"Your highness?"

"This, of course, is as yet a state secret, and my reason for telling you is not a princess's, but a woman's. Solve it if you can."

Carmichael fumbled the reins blindly. "They say that he is a handsome young man."

"What has that to do with it? The interest he takes in his kingdom is positively negative. There will be only one king in Jugendheit, and that will be the prince regent."

They were silent for a few minutes. Finally the ambassador spoke.

"I have some news for your highness. I am about to ask for my recall."

The color on her cheeks paled a shade lighter.

"Is not this sudden?" she asked.

"I am essentially a man of action, your highness. I am growing dull and stupid amid these charming pleasures. I am wicked enough to wish for war."

"Cherchez la femme!" she cried.

"There is a woman?"

"Oh, yes!" recklessly.

"Then go to her, my friend; go to her." And she waved her crop over his head as in benediction.

He did not speak, but caught up the reins firmly. She did most of the talking, brightly and gayly, but his ears were dull for the undercurrent passed by him. He was thinking deeply of her.

Within a few hundred yards of the gates Carmichael saw a lonely figure sitting on the parapet. He would have recognized that square form anywhere.

"Your highness, do you see that man yonder on the parapet? We fought in the same cavalry. He is covered with scars. Not one man in a thousand would have gone through what he did and lived."

"Is he an American?"

"By adoption. May I present him? It will be the joy of his life."

"Certainly. Brave men interest me."

Grumbach rose, thinking that the riders were going to pass him. But

his friend Carmichael stopped his horse.

"Herr Grumbach," said Carmichael, "her serene highness desires me to present you."

Hans was stricken dumb. She piled him with a number of questions—how many battles they had fought in, how many times they had been wounded.

Her highness's mare grew restive and began pawing the road. She reined in quickly. As she did so something yellow flashed downward to the ground. Grumbach hastened forward.

"My locket," said her highness anxiously.

"It is not broken, highness," said Grumbach.

Then he handed it to her gravely.

"Thank you!" Her highness put the locket into a small purse which she carried in her belt, touched the mare, and sped up the road, Carmichael following.

Grumbach returned to the parapet. "Gott!" he murmured.

His face was as livid as the scar on his head.

CHAPTER XI.  
THE WRONG MAN.

HERBECK dropped his quill, and there was a dream in his eyes. He sat there motionless, rapt. And thus the duke found him. He held a letter in his hand and tossed it to Herbeck.

"I shall throw 10,000 men across the frontier tonight."

"War again?"

"Read that. It is the second anonymous communication I have received within a week. As the first was truthful, there is no reason to believe this one to be false."

Herbeck was genuinely startled.

"What do you say to that?" triumphantly.

"This—let them go quietly back to Jugendheit."

"No!" blazed the duke.

"Are we rich enough for war?"

"What the devil is my army for if not to uphold my dignity, Herbeck?"

"Rather let me reason. This is some prank. They would never dare enter Dreiberg for aught else."

"I have seen this writing before," said Herbeck.

The duke struck the bell violently.

"Summon the chief of police," he said to the secretary.

"Will your highness leave the matter in my hands?" asked the chancellor.

"Herbeck, in some things you are weak."

"And in others I am strong," smiled the chancellor. "I am weak when there is talk of war; I am strong when peace is in the balance."

"Is it possible, Herbeck, that you do not appreciate the magnitude of the situation?"

"It is precisely because I do that I wish to move slowly. Wait. Let the police find out why they are here. There will be time enough then to declare war. They have never seen her highness. Who knows?"

"Ah! But they have violated the treaty."

"That depends upon whether their presence here is or is not a menace to the state. If they are here on private concerns which in no wise touch Ehrenstein it would be foolhardy to declare war."

"What do you advise?" wearily.

"Wait. In a day or so arrest them under the pretext that you believe them to be spies. If this invasion is harmless and they declare themselves the matter can be adjusted in this wise: Ignore their declaration and confine them a day or two in the city prison, then publish the news broadcast. Having themselves broken the letter if not the spirit of the treaty, they will not dare declare war. Every court in Europe will laugh."

The duke laughed. "You are right, Herbeck. Ah, here is the chief."

Herbeck read the letter in part to the chief, who jotted down the words, repeating aloud in a kind of mutter: "A mountaineer, a vintner, a carter, a butcher and a baker. You will give me their descriptions, your excellency?"

Herbeck read the postscript.

"But you didn't tell him who?"

"Why should he know?" said Herbeck, glancing shrewdly at the duke.

"His ignorance will be all the better for the plot."

"One is as big and powerful as a Carpathian bear. Look out," warned Herbeck.

"And he is?"

"The mountaineer."

"And the vintner?"

"Oh, he is a little fellow and hasn't grown his bite yet," said Herbeck dryly.

The duke laughed again.

"I thank you, Herbeck. You have neatly arranged a bye comedy. When the arrest is made, give it as much publicity as possible. Take a squad of soldiers. It will give it a military look."

"No, your highness," touching the papers which swelled his desk. "This will keep me busy well into the evening."

The duke left the cabinet. Herbeck instructed the chief.

"Begin with the mountaineer and the vintner; the others do not matter so much." Then Herbeck laughed. The chief raised his head. He had not heard his excellency laugh like that in many moons. "Report to me your progress. Good luck to you!" said Herbeck with a gesture of dismissal.

Her highness found the duke waiting in her apartments.

"Why, father," kissing him, "what brings you here?"

"A little idea I have in mind." He drew her down to the arm of the chair.

"We all have our little day dreams."

"Who does not, father?" She said her arm round his neck.

"Herr Carmichael is a fine fellow, brave, witty, shrewd. If all Americans are like him America will soon become a force in the world. I have taken a fancy to him, and you know what they say of your father—no formality with those whom he likes. Humanly I am right, but in the virtue of everyday events in court life I am wrong. Herbeck has spoken of it, the older women speak of it, and they all say—"

"What do I care what they say?" hotly. "Are you not the grand duke, and am I not your daughter?"

"You must ride no more with Herr Carmichael. It is neither wise nor safe."

"Father?"

He was up with his arms folding around her. "Child, it is only for your sake. Listen to me."

"You must be a princess. You must steel your heart against the invasion of love unless it comes from a state equal or superior to your own."

"Yes, father. I shall not ride with him any more."

"Be a brave heart, and I shall engage to find a king for you."

"I don't want any playthings, father," with the old light touch, and then she looked him full in the eyes. "I promise to do nothing more to create comment if, on the other hand, you will promise to give me two years more of freedom."

The duke readily assented and shortly returned to his suit rather pleased that there had been no scene—not that he had expected any.

Considerable activity was manifest in the police bureau the rest of that day.

To return to Carmichael, he had never before concerned himself with resignations. Up to this hour he had never resigned anything he had set his heart upon. So it was not an easy matter for him to compose a letter to the secretary of state resigning the post at Dreiberg. True, he added that he desired to be transferred to a seaport town, France or Italy preferred. The high altitude in Dreiberg had affected his heart. However, in case there was no other available post they would kindly appoint his successor at once. It took courage indeed to face the matter squarely and resolutely. That she was not going to marry the king of Jugendheit did not alter his affairs in the least. It was all hopeless. He must go.

Some one was knocking on the door.

"A letter for your excellency," said the concierge.

"If Herr Carmichael would learn the secret of No. 40 Krumerweg let him attire himself as a vintner and be in the Krumerweg at 8 o'clock tonight."

This note was at once to the recipient as the flowers in the spring. An adventure? He was ready, now and always.

"I shall need the costume of a vintner this evening," he said.

"Oh, that will be easy," affirmed the concierge.

So it came about that Carmichael, dressed as a vintner, his hat over his eyes, stole into the misty night and took the way to the Krumerweg. He

knew exactly where he wished to go—No. 40. After all, who was the lady in black, and why should he bother himself about her? She probably came from the back stairs of the palace. And yet the chancellor himself had been in this place.

A step? He trained his ear. But even as he did so his arms were grasped firmly and twisted behind his back, and at the same time a cloth was wrapped round the lower part of his face, leaving only his eyes and nose visible. He was helpless. He was fighting against three.

Then one of the three whistled. A minute or two after a closed carriage came into the Krumerweg, and Carmichael was literally bundled inside. His feet and hands were bound.

The carriage began to move slowly. One turn after another he counted, fixing as well as he could the topography of the town through which they were passing. Once the road outside of Dreiberg was reached a fast pace was set. At the Jugendheit barrier the carriage stopped. Presently there appeared at the door an old man dressed as a mountaineer. In his hand was a lantern.

"Pardon me, dear nephew—Fools!" he broke off, swinging round. "He has tricked you all. This is not he!"

Three astonished faces peered over the old man's shoulder. One was a carter, another a butcher and the third a baker.

Carmichael, now freed, stretched himself.

"Well?" he said, with a dangerous quiet.

"Herr Carmichael, the American consul!" The old man nearly dropped the lantern. "Oh, your infernal block-heads!"

Carmichael's anger dissolved, and he laughed. All the mystery was gone. He saw how neatly he had been duped. He still carried the note. This he gave to the leader of this midnight expedition.

"Humph!" said the old man in a growl. "I thought as much." He whispered to his companions. "Herr Carmichael, I shall have the honor of escorting you back to Dreiberg."

On the way it all came back to Carmichael with the vividness of a forgotten photograph come upon suddenly—Bonn, the Rhine, swift and turbulent, a towheaded young fellow who could not swim well, his own plunge, his fingers in the faxen hair and the hard fight to the landing. All this was a tale twice told.

Vintner? Not much!

CHAPTER XII.  
HER FAN.

IT was dawn when they began to pull up the road to Dreiberg in a carriage. The mountaineer had been riding with the driver. The carriage stopped.

"I shall not intrude, I trust?" said the old man, opening the door and getting in.

"Not now," replied Carmichael.

"What is all this about?"

"A trifle." The old man thought for awhile. "Suppose you had a nephew who was making a fool of himself over a woman."

"Nothing unusual in that."

"Suppose, though of good character, she was vastly his inferior in station; that marriage to him was merely a political contract. What would you do?"

"I believe I begin to understand."

"I am grateful for that."

"Your nephew is an ungrateful wretch. He knew all along who I was," went on the American. "I dragged him out of the Rhine upon a certain day, and he plays this trick!"

"You? Carmichael, Carmichael, of course; I should have remembered the name as he wrote me at the time. Thank you! And you knew him all the while?"

"No. I recalled his face, but the time and place were in the dark till this early morning. Here we are at the gates. What's this? Guards? I never saw them at these gates before."

After some trouble they passed the guards.

The mountaineer got out quickly, closed the door, spoke a word to the driver and slipped into an alleyway.

Carmichael arrived at the Grand hotel in time to see her serene highness, accompanied by two of her ladies and an escort of four soldiers, start out for her morning ride. He waited till they had passed, then slunk into the hotel. The concierge gazed at him in amazement. Carmichael winked. The concierge smiled. He understood. American or Ehrensteiner, the young fellows were all the same.

"Guards at the gates," mused Carmichael as he soaked his head and face in cold water. "By George, it looks as if my friend the vintner was in for some excitement!"

Grethen! Carmichael stopped, his collar but halfway around his throat. Now, by the Lord, that should not be! He would wring the vintner's neck. He was not in an amiable mood. Some one hammered on the door.

Grumbach entered.

"You are angry about something," he said.

"So I am. But you are always welcome."

"You have overslept?"

"No; on the contrary."

"You are disturbed. I'd like to know what's going on in that bullet head of yours."

"I have resigned the consulship."

"And for what reason?"

Carmichael silently drew on his coat.

"Ah! So you have one too?"

"One what?"

"One secret."

"Yes. But it's the kind we can't talk about."

"I understand. Have you had breakfast?"

"No."

"Neither have I. Let us go together."

There was a large crowd outside the palace that night, which was clear and starry, because of a great ball. A troop of cavalry patrolled the fence. Carriage after carriage rolled in through the gates, coming directly from the opera.

And close by the sentry box Carmichael saw Gretchen and her vintner. Carmichael could not resist stopping a moment. He raised his hat to Gretchen to the wonder of those nearest.

"Do you know where the American consulate is?" he asked low, so that none but Gretchen and the vintner heard.

"Yes," said the vintner, blushing with shame. "I live above the agency."

"Good! I shall expect to see you in the morning."

But the vintner was determined that he shouldn't. He would be at work in the royal vineyards on the morrow.

"Tomorrow?" repeated Gretchen, to whom this byplay was a blank. "Why should he wish to see you?"

"Who knows? Let us be going. It is half after 10," he added, as if to put forward some logical excuse for leaving at this moment.

A man followed them all the way to the Krumerweg.

Carmichael threw himself eagerly into the gayety of the dance. He was an accomplished waltzer, after the manner of that day, when one went round and round like some mechanical toy wound up. This would be the last affair of the kind for him, and he wanted a full memory of it. Between times he exchanged a jest or two with the chancellor or talked battles with old Duewitz. Thrice while on the floor her highness passed him. But there was never a smile, never a glance. He became careless and reckless. He would seek her and talk to her and smile at her even if the duke threw a regiment in between. He saw Grumbach in the gallery.

"Now, what the devil is the Dutchman doing with a pair of opera glasses?"

Later her highness stood before one of the long windows in the conservatory listlessly watching the people in the square. Was that some one coming for her? She turned.

It was Carmichael.

What an opportunity for scandal! She laughed inwardly. The barons and their wives, the ambassadors' wives and their daughters, would miss them both. And the spirit of devilry lay also upon her heart. She smiled

at the man and with her fan bade him be seated at her side.

"You have not asked me to dance tonight," she declared.

"I am neither a prince nor an ambassador."

"But you have danced with me."

"Yes; I have been to heaven now and then."

"And do you eject yourself thus easily?"

"By turning myself out my self esteem remains unruffled."

"Then you expected to be turned out?"

"As I have said, I am not a prince. I am only a consul, not even a diplomat, simply a business arm of my government. My diplomacy never ascends above the quality of hops and wines imported. I am supposed to

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"And so Dreiberg no longer appeals to you? You once told me that you loved it."

"I am cursed with wanderlust, your highness."

"You promised to tell me what she is like."

Suddenly all his fear went away, all his trepidation. The spirit of recklessness which had visited him a little while ago again empowered him. He was afraid of nothing.

"How shall I describe her?" he said. "I have seen only paintings and marbles, and these are inanimate. Have you ever seen ripe wheat in a rain-storm? That is the color of her hair. There are jade and lapis lazuli in her eyes." He leaned toward her. "And I love her better than life, better than hope, and between us there is the distance of a thousand worlds