

The Goose Girl

By HAROLD MacGRATH

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SYNOPSIS

Gretchen, a goose girl, meets a mysterious mountaineer and Carmichael, American consul in Dreiberg, Kingdom of Ehrenstein. Carmichael loves Princess Hildegarde.

Gretchen's lover is Leo, a vintner. The prince regent of Jugendheit sends Hildegarde an offer of marriage from King Frederick. The princess was abducted in infancy and later restored to her father, the grand duke.

Gretchen and Leo are wed after the vintage. Hans Grumbach of America reaches Dreiberg.

Carmichael becomes fond of Grumbach, who admits he was born in Dreiberg. Hildegarde's betrothal is announced.

Chancellor Herbeck suspects Grumbach, who later tells Carmichael his real name is Brunner. He has a forged passport. King Frederick refuses to marry Hildegarde, who is pleased.

"I will give you an opera ticket for the season. How can I reward you for bringing this message? Don't have any false pride. Ask for something."

"Well, then, highness, give me an order on the grand duke's head vintner for a place."

"For the man who is to become your husband?"

"Yes, highness."

"You shall have it tomorrow. Now, come with me. I am going to take you to Herr Ernst. He is the director of the opera. He rehearses in the court theater this morning."

Gretchen followed the princess. As her highness entered the Bijou theater the herr direktor stopped the music. In the little gallery which served as the royal box sat several ladies and gentlemen of the court, the grand duke being among them.

"I have brought you a prima donna, Herr Direktor," pointing to Gretchen. Herr Direktor showed his teeth.

"What shall she sing in, your highness? We are rehearsing 'The Bohemian Girl,'" he jested.

The chorus and singers on the little stage exchanged smiles.

"I want your first violin," said her highness.

"Anton!"

A youth stood up in the orchestral pit.

"Now, your highness," said the herr direktor.

"Try her voice."

And the herr direktor saw that she was not smiling. He bade the violinist to draw his bow over a single note. "Imitate it, Gretchen," commanded her highness, "and don't be afraid."

Gretchen lifted her voice. It was sweeter and mellower than the violin.

"Again!" the herr direktor cried.

Without apparent effort Gretchen passed from one note to another, now high, now low, or strong or soft; a trill, a run. The violinist of his own accord began the jewel song from "Faust." Gretchen did not know the words, but she carried the melody without mishap. And then "I Dreamt I Dwelt In Marble Halls." This song she knew word for word, and, ah, she sang it with strange and haunting tenderness. One by one the musicians dropped their instruments to their knees. All realized that a great voice was being tried before them. The herr direktor struck his music stand sharply.

"Your highness has played a fine jest this day. Where does madame your guest sing—in Berlin or Vienna?"

"In neither," answered her highness. "She lives in Dreiberg, and till this morning I never saw her before."

The herr direktor stared blankly from her highness to Gretchen and back to her highness again. Then he grasped it. Here was one of those moments when the gods make gifts to mortals.

"You have a great voice, fraulein. I shall teach you. I shall make you a great singer."

But Gretchen never became a prima donna. There was something different on the knees of the gods.

CHAPTER VII. AFFAIRS OF STATE.

THE grand duke stamped back and forth with a rumble as of distant thunder. They would play with him, eh? Well, they had loosed the lion this time. He had sent his valet to summon her highness and Herbeck.

"And tell them to put everything else aside."

He knuded the note in his hand powerfully. It was anonymous, but it spoke clearly, like truth. The sender remained undiscoverable.

Had he not opposed it for months? And now, having surrendered against his better judgment, this gratuitous affront was offered him. It was damnable. He snote the offending note. War! Nothing less. He was prepared for it. Twenty thousand troops were now in the valley, and there were 20,000 reserves.

Herbeck came calmly in.

"Why the devil couldn't you have left well enough alone? Read this! The duke flung the note down on his desk.

Herbeck picked it up and worked out the creases.

"Well?" The query tingled with rage.

The answer on the chancellor's lips was not uttered. Hildegarde came in. He embraced her and kissed her brow.

"Read," said the duke to her.

She slipped from her father's arms and looked with pity at the chancellor.

"What do you think of this, Hildegarde?"

"Why, father, I think it is the very best thing in the world," dryly.

"An insult like this?" The duke grew rigid. "You accept it calmly in this fashion?"

"Shall I weep and tear my hair over a boy I have never seen? No, thank you. I was about to make known to you this very evening that I had reconsidered the offer. I shall never marry his majesty."

Herbeck explained the situation.

"Your highness, the regent is really not to blame, for his majesty had given him free rein in the matter, and his royal highness, working as I have been for the best interests of the two countries, never dreamed that the king would rebel. The king has been generous enough to leave the publicity in our hands—that is to say, he agrees to accept the humiliation of being rejected by her serene highness."

"That is very generous of him!" said the duke sarcastically. "Send for Ducwitz."

"Ducwitz, your highness?" cried the chancellor, chilled.

"Immediately!"

"Your highness, if you call Ducwitz I shall surrender my portfolio." The chancellor was firm.

"Do so. There are others to take up your work."

Hildegarde flew to the duke's side and snatched at his sleeve.

"Father, you are mad!"

"At least I am master in Ehrenstein. Herbeck, you will have the kindness to summon General Ducwitz."

"Your highness," replied Herbeck, "I have worked long and faithfully in your service. I can not recollect that I ever asked one personal favor. But I do so now. Do not send for Ducwitz tonight. See him in the morning. This is no time for haste. You will throw the army into Jugendheit, and there will follow a bloody war."

"I will have my revenge!" stubbornly.

"Father, listen to me. I am the affronted person. I—I alone—have the right to say what shall be done in the matter. And I say to you if you do these cruel things, dismiss his excellency and bring war and death to Ehrenstein. I will never forgive you—never, never! You are wrong, wrong, and I, your daughter, tell you so frankly. Leave it to me. There will be neither war nor humiliation."

"My dear child," he said, "I have suffered too much at the hands of Jugendheit. It was my daughter the first time: it is my honor now," proudly.

"Will it balance war and devastation?" the girl asked quietly. "Is it not pride rather than honor?"

The prince regent made a pardonable blunder. Do not you, my father, make an unpardonable one?"

"A Portia to the judgment!" said the chancellor, his eye kindling. "Let me balance war and devastation?"

"I am alone am to blame. It was I who first suggested the alliance."

Notwithstanding that he was generally hasty, the duke was a just man. He offered his hand, with half a smile.

"You are bidding me farewell, your highness?" said Herbeck.

"No, count. I would not let you go for half my duchy. Even a duke may be a fool sometimes."

Herbeck laid his cold hand upon the duke's. Then he went over to her highness and kissed her hand gratefully, for it was truly at her feet the wreath of victory lay.

"Highness," he said softly, "you shall marry when you will."

"And where?"

"I would that I could make it so. But there is a penalty for being placed so high. We cannot change this unwritten law."

"Heaven did not write it," she replied.

"No, my daughter," said the duke. "Man is at the bottom of all the kinks and twists in this short life, not heaven. But Herbeck is right. You shall marry when you will."

The knock of the valet was again heard.

"Your highness, there is a young woman outside, a peasant, who desires to speak to her serene highness."

"What! She enters the palace without any more trouble than this?"

"By my orders, father," said Hildegarde, who gathered that this privileged visitor must be Gretchen of the Krumerweg. "Admit her."

Gretchen was ushered in. Her throat was a little full as she recognized the three most important persons in the grand duchy.

"The little goose girl!" the duke said half audibly.

"Yes, highness," Gretchen's face was serious, and her eyes were mournful. She carried an envelope in her hand tightly.

"Come to me, Gretchen," said the princess. "What is it?"

"She is dead, highness, and I found this letter under her pillow."

Herbeck took the envelope.

"Dead?" Hildegarde's eyes flashed.

"Who is dead?" demanded the duke.

"Emma Schultz, father. Oh, I know you will forgive me for this deception. She has been in Dreiberg for a month, dying, and I have often stolen out to see her." She let her tears fall unstrained.

The duke stared at the rug. Presently he said: "Let her be buried in consecrated ground. Wrong or right, that chapter is closed, my child. What is the letter, Herbeck?"

Herbeck was a strong man. He was always far removed from tears, but there was a mist over the usual clarity of his vision. He ripped down the flap. It was only a simple note to her serene highness begging her to give the enclosed banknotes to one Gretchen, who lived in the Krumerweg. The notes represented a thousand crowns.

"Take them, little goose girl," said the duke. "Your ship has come in. This will be your dowry."

An icy shiver ran up and down Gretchen's spine, a shiver of wonder, delight, terror. A thousand crowns! A fortune!

"And I shall add to it another thousand," said Hildegarde. "Give them to me, father."

In all this fortune amounted to little more than \$400, but to Gretchen, frugal and thrifty, to whom a single crown was a large sum, to her it represented wealth. She was now the richest girl in the lower town. Dreams of kaleidoscopic variety flew through her head. Tears sprang into her eyes. She had the power to do no more than weep.

The duke was the first to relieve the awkwardness of the moment.

"Count, has it not occurred to you that we stand in the presence of two very beautiful young women?"

Herbeck scrutinized Gretchen with care. Then he compared her with the princess. The duke was right. And the thing which struck him with most force was that, while each possessed a beauty individual to herself, it was not opposite, but strangely alike.

When the duke was alone he slowly passed on to his secretary and opened a drawer. He laid a small bundle on the desk and untied the string. One by one he ranged the articles—two little yellow shoes, a little cloak trimmed with ermine. There had been a locket, but that was now worn by her highness.

Hermann Brunner lived in the granite lodge just within the eastern gates of the royal gardens. He was a widower and shared the ample lodge with the undergardeners and their families. He was a man of brooding moods, and there was no laughter in his withered heart. He adjusted his heavy spectacles and held the note slanting toward the candle. A note or a letter was a singular event in Hermann's life. This note, left by the porter of the Grand hotel, moved him with surprise. It requested that he present himself at 8 o'clock at the office of the hotel and ask to be directed to the room of Hans Grumbach, whoever he might be.

He decided to go. Certainly this man Grumbach did not urge him without some definite purpose. The concierge at the hotel, who knew Hermann, conducted him to room 10 on the entresole. Hermann knocked. A voice bade him enter.

"You wished to see me?"

"Yes," offering a chair.

"You are Hermann Brunner," began Grumbach, "and you once had a brother named Hans."

Hermann grew rigid in his chair. "I have no brother."

"You did have."

Hermann's head dropped. "My God, yes, I did have a brother, but he was a scoundrel."

"Perhaps he was a scoundrel. He is—dead?" softly.

"God's will be done!" But Hermann's face turned lighter.

"As a boy he loved you."

"And did I not love him?" said Hermann fiercely. "Did I not worship that boy, who was more like a son to me than a brother?"

"I knew your brother. I knew him well. He was not a scoundrel, only weak. He went to America and became successful in business. He fought with the north in the war. He was not a coward. He did his fighting bravely and honorably. He died facing the enemy, and his last words were of you. He begged your forgiveness. He

[To be Continued]

Department of the Interior,
U. S. Land Office, at Roseburg, Oregon,
September 14, 1910.

Notice is hereby given that Albert N. Treadgold of Cass City, Michigan, who on September 3, 1909, made Timber and Stone Entry No. 05456, for Lots 2, 3 and 4, Section 2, Township 30, S. Range 14 W. W. Meridian, has filed notice of intention to make Final Timber and Stone Proof, to establish claim to the land above described, before A. D. Morse, United States Commissioner, at Bandon, Oregon, on the 29th day of Nov. 1910.

Claimant names as witnesses:
Robert Walker, of Bandon, Oregon.
Harry Walker, of Bandon, Oregon.
G. T. Treadgold, of Bandon, Oregon.
Pearl R. Walker, of Bandon, Oregon.

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