

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 prince was abducted in infancy and later restored to his father, the grand duke.

Her highness and Leo are to wed after the village feast. Grumbach of America follows them.

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 Bismarck. He has a forged passport. King Frederick refuses to marry Hildegarde, who is pleased.

Gretchen takes a letter from a mysterious old woman to Hildegarde. This woman was cured for Hildegarde when she was abducted.

Herbeck prevents the grand duke from entering with an engagement. Grumbach proves to have been one of the princess's abductors.

Leo, the vintner, escapes when the police raid a Socialist meeting. Gretchen hears he is a spy from Jugendheit. The mountaineer shadows him. Leo lays a trap for Carmichael.

The mountaineer defends Gretchen from insult and offers her a palace and jewels. She declines. An old clock mender is recognized by the mountaineer. Grumbach meets Hildegarde and is amazed by a locket she carries.

The grand duke and Herbeck plan to arrest Leo and the mountaineer. Carmichael is abducted by the mountaineer's party who think he is Leo.

Carmichael tells Hildegarde he loves her. Grumbach studies Hildegarde with opera glasses. A spy claims a reward offered by the clock mender. Grumbach tells Carmichael that he and a gypsy stole the princess.

Grumbach sees a scar on Gretchen's arm and recognizes the gypsy. Grumbach, the clock mender and the gypsy offer to right a great wrong.

Carmichael recognizes Leo, the vintner, as King Frederick of Jugendheit. The mountaineer is his uncle, the prince regent. They are arrested. Gretchen finds she loves a king.

Grumbach tells the grand duke that Gretchen, not Hildegarde, is his daughter and the real princess. The grand duke suspects Herbeck as the arch plotter.

Herbeck admits that he had the real princess, Gretchen, abducted and later substituted his own daughter, Hildegarde, in her place. King Frederick offers to marry Gretchen.

Hildegarde, disgraced father and Carmichael sail for America. Carmichael's love for Hildegarde is returned.

"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 daff over grinning 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 my 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 gaily, 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



"AH, BUT I SHALL LEAD SOME KING A MERRY LIFE!"

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' 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



"YOU HAVE NEATLY ARRANGED A FINE COMEDY."

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 fine 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 strewn his desk. "This will keep me busy well into the evening."

The duke left the cabinet.

[To Be Continued]

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