

# 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 Jugendheim sends Hildegarde an order of marriage from King Frederick. The prince was abducted in infancy and later restored to his father, the grand duke.

Gretchen and Leo are to wed after the vintage. Hans Grumbach of America rescues 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.

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

Herbeck prevents the grand duke from declaring war on Jugendheim. 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 Jugendheim. 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 gypsy 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 Jugendheim. 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, her disgraced father and Carmichael sail for America. Carmichael's love for Hildegarde is returned.

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 slid 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 Jugendheim 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 as welcome 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 Jugendheim 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 carrier, 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, you 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.

VINTNER? NOT MUCH! his fingers in the flaxen 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 stunk into the hotel. The concierge gazed at him in amazement. Carmichael winked. The concierge smiled. He understood. Ameri-

enter or Ehrensteiner, the young fellows were all the same.

"Guards at the gates," missed 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!"

Gretchen! 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. "Ach! 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.

[To be Continued.]

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