

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 to wed after the village. 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 Breunner. 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 is cared for by Hildegarde when she was abducted.

Herbeck prevents the grand duke from declaring war on Jugendheit. Grumbach proves to have been one of the princess' 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 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 fight 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, her disgraced father and Carmichael sail for America. Carmichael's love for Hildegarde is returned.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WHITE SCAR.

"YOU"—began the steward. "Patience, Hoffman!" warned her highness. Then she laughed blithely.

"Your wat, second!" cried Hoffman.

The vintner snatched off his hat apologetically and swung it around on the tips of his fingers.

"Is this the way you work?" "I have picked nine baskets."

"You should have picked twelve."

It interested her highness to note that this handsome young fellow was not afraid of the head vintner. So this was Gretchen's lover? He was really handsome. There was nothing coarse about his features or figure.

The pause was broken by Gretchen. "Fardon, highness!"

"For what, Gretchen?"

"For not having seen your approach."

"That was my fault, not yours. When is the wedding?"

"After the vintage, highness."

Her highness then spoke to the bridegroom elect. "You will be good to her?"

"Who could help it, your highness?"

The pronoun struck her oddly, for peasants as a usual thing never used it in addressing the nobility.

"Well, on the day of the wedding I will stand sponsor to you both. And good luck go with you."

She passed down the aisle, the head vintner following, wagging his head.

The day was ended. The lad swung the basket to his shoulder, and the sun, flashing upon its contents, turned the bloomy globes into dull rubies. He presented his card at the office and was duly credited with three crowns, which, according to Gretchen, was a fine day's work. Hoffman said nothing about dismissal.

"Come day after tomorrow. Tomorrow is a feast day. You are always having feast days when work begins. All summer long you loaf about, but the minute you start to work you must find excuses to lay off. Clear out, both of you!"

"Work at last," said Dietrich as he and Gretchen started for the city.

Arm in arm they went on. Sometimes Gretchen sang. Often he put her hand to his lips. By and by they came abreast of an old gypsy. He wore a coat of Joseph's, and his face was as lined as a frost bitten apple.

"Will you tell me how to find the Adlergasse?" he asked in broken German. His accent was that of a Magyar.

They carelessly gave him specific directions and passed on. He followed grimly, like fate, whose agent he was, though long delayed. When he reached the Adlergasse he looked for a sign. He came to a stop in front of the dingy shop of the clock mender. He went inside, and the ancient clock mender

looked up from his work, for he was always working. He rose wearily.

The gypsy smiled mysteriously and laid a hand on his heart.

"Who are you?" sharply demanded the clock mender.

"Who I am does not matter. I am he whom you seek."

"God in heaven!" The bony hands of the clock mender clutched the other's coat.

The gypsy released himself slowly. "But first show me your pretty crowns and the paper which will give me immunity from the police. Your crowns, as you offered, and immunity; then I speak."

"Man, I can give you the crowns, but God knows I have no longer the power to give you immunity."

The gypsy shouldered his bundle. "For God's sake, wait!" begged the clock mender.

But the gypsy walked out, unheeding.

Two days later, in the afternoon.

"Grumbach," said Carmichael, "what were you looking at the other night with those opera glasses at the ball?"

"I was looking into the past."

"Oh, pshaw! You were following her highness with them. I want to know why."

"She is beautiful."

"You made a promise to me not long ago."

"I did?" noncommittally.

"Yes. Soon I shall be shaking the dust of Dreiberg, and I want to know beforehand what this Chinese puzzle is. What did you do that compelled your flight from Ehrenstein?"

Grumbach's pipe hung pendulous in his hand. He swung it to and fro absently.

"I am waiting. Remember, you are an American citizen for all that you were born here. If anything should happen to you I must know the whole story in order to help you. You know that you may trust me."

"It isn't that, captain. I have grown to like you in these few days. Those opera glasses—it was an idea. Well, since you will know, I was a garden-er's boy. I worked under my brother Hermann. I used to ask the nurse, who had charge of her serene highness, where she would go each day. Then I'd cut flowers and meet them on the road somewhere and give the bouquet to the child. There was never any escort—a footman and a driver. The little one was always greatly pleased, and she would call me Hans. I was in love those days." Grumbach laughed with bitterness. "Yes, even I. Her name was Tekla, and she was a jade. I wanted to run away, but I had no money. I had already secured a passport—no matter how. It was the first affair, and I was desperately hurt. One day a gypsy came to me. I shall always know him by the yellow spot in one of his black eyes. I was given a thousand crowns to tell him which road her highness was to be driven over the next day. As I said, I was mad with love. Why a gypsy should want to ride where her highness was going to ride was of no consequence to me. I told him. I was to get the money the same night. It was thus that her highness was stolen. It was thus that I became necessary before the fact, as the lawyers say. Flight with a band of Magyar gypsies; weary days in the mountains, with detachments of troops scouring the whole duchy. Finally I escaped. A fortune was offered for the immediate return of the child. At the time I believed that it was an abduction for ransom. But no one ever came forward for the reward. There was a price on my head when it was known that I had fled."

"And no one ever came for the reward? That is strange. Was immunity promised?"

Carmichael asked.

"It was inferred, but not literally promised."

"Fear kept them away."

"Perhaps. And there is Arnsberg."

"Was he guilty?"

"I never saw his hand anywhere."

"So this is the story! Well, when a man's in love he is more or less in the clutch of temporary insanity. I've a wild streak in me also. But what I can't understand is why you return and put your head in the lion's mouth. The police will stumble on something. If you are arrested I could do little for you. The United States protects only harmless political outcasts. Yours is a crime such as nullifies your citizenship, and any government would be compelled to send you back here if the demand was made for your extradition."

"I know all that."

"I suppose that when conscience drives me must go on. But the princess has been found. The best thing you can do is to put your passports into immediate use and return to the States. You can do no good here."

"Maybe." Grumbach refilled his pipe, lighted it and without saying more went out and down into the street.

Carmichael watched him through the window.

"He's a queer codger, and it's a queer story. I don't believe I have heard it all either. What was he really hunting for with those glasses? I give it up."

He was not angry with Grumbach. Rather he seemed to be drawn to him more closely than ever. Mad with love—that was the phrase. He counted

it over and over—died with love. That excused many things.

Grumbach was indeed perturbed, and this sensation was the result of what he had not told his friend, Gott! And after a time he was in the Adlergasse. And of all that happy, noisy family only he and Hermann left! In one of the open doorways, for it was warm, a final caress of vanishing summer, he saw a fat, youngish woman knitting woolen hose. Two or three children sprawled about her knees. There was that petulance of lip and forehead which marked the dissatisfaction of the coquette married.

"Tekla!" Grumbach murmured.

He was not conscious that he had paused, but the woman was. She eyed him with the mild indifference of the bovine. Then she dropped her glance, and the shining needles clicked afresh. Grumbach forced his step onward. And for this! He laughed discordantly. The woman looked up again wonderingly. Now, why should this stranger laugh all by himself like that?

Hans saw the sign of the Black Eagle and directed his steps thitherward. He sat down and ordered a beer, but did not touch the glass. And what right, he pondered, had conscience to drag him back to Ehrenstein, where he had known the bitterest and happiest moments of his life? And yet, all as he might at this invisible restraint called conscience, he saw God's direction in this return. Only he, Hans Grumbach, knew and one other. And that other, who?

Fat—Tekla was fat, and he had treasured the fair picture of her youth long years. Well, there was an end to that. Little fat Tekla, to have nearly overturned a duchy! And then Hans became aware of voices close at hand.

"Yes, frau, he is at work in the grand duke's vineyards. And think, the first day he picked nine baskets."

"That is good, but I know many a one who can pick their twelve. And you are to be married when the vintage is done? You will make a fine wife, Gretchen."

"And he a fine husband."

"And you will bring him a dowry too. But his own people—what does he say of them?"

"He has no parents, only an uncle, who doesn't count. We shall live with grandmother and pay her rent."

"And you are wearing a new dress," admiringly.

Gretchen preened herself. Hans dropped the lid of his stein and pushed it away. His heart always warmed at the sight of this goose girl. He counted down the small change for the beer, slid back in his chair and sauntered to the bar.

"Good day to you, herr," was her greeting.

"When is the wedding? I should like to come to it."

"You will be welcome, herr."

"And may I bring along a little present?"

[To be Continued]

Town Topics.

Five Houstonians returned from Chicago last week, and only four of them were robbed while in that town—Houston Post.

The mayor of New York is closing up the "lobster palaces." What is he trying to do—starve his people?—Philadelphia North American.

New York ought to be able to get along with only six all night drinking places at least as well as Boston can get along without any.—Boston Globe.

Pittsburg smokeless? Yes, when New York is noiseless, Philadelphia leafless, Chicago modest and San Francisco plous.—Syracuse Post-Standard.

FILLED WITH CURIOSITY.

That Was Why He Was Anxiously Waiting Outside the House.

The man was standing behind a tree in front of an apartment house in a cross street when the cop on that beat came pounding along on the sidewalk. It was close to midnight, and naturally the cop stopped and looked at the man standing behind the tree.

"Howdy," says the cop, by way of opening conversation.

"You're another," replied the man good naturedly.

"Whut-huh doin'—waitin' for somebody?" inquired the brave policeman.

"None."

"Just standin' there, hey?"

"You've hit it."

"Live near here, do you?"

"Right in there," says the citizen, jerking his thumb in the direction of the apartment house he was standing in front of.

The cop looked at him thoughtfully for a minute.

"Meby it's none of my business," he says, "and then again meby it is. I don't like to go round buttin' into anybody's private affairs, but tell me, neighbor, what's your graft, anyhow?"

"Well," loosened up the citizen, "if it's a case of me a-tellin' you or you croakin' from curiosity right in front of my eyes, I'll tell you how it is—provided it don't go any further. My wife says to me when I started downtown this evenin', 'if you're not home by midnight I'm goin' to pack up and go right back to mother's. So there?'"

"Well," says the cop.

"Well," repeated the citizen, "it's just about midnight now, and I'm like you—I've got curiosity. I'm waitin' here to see if she's goin' to keep her word."

The cop's curiosity ceased at that point, and he walked on down the street whistling, without waiting to see the thing out.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

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