

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 Hildegard.

Gretchen's lover is Leo, a vintner. The prince regent of Jugendheit sends Hildegard 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 led to the estate of the vintner, Hans Grumbach of America, rescues Dreiberg.

Carmichael becomes fond of Grumbach, who admits he was born in Dreiberg. Hildegard'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 Hildegard, who is pleased.

Gretchen takes a letter from a mysterious old woman to Hildegard. This woman cared for Hildegard 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 Hildegard 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 Hildegard he loves her. Grumbach studies Hildegard 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 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 Hildegard, 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, Hildegard, in her place. King Frederick offers to marry Gretchen.

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

"You, my child? I have wronged you greatest of all. The wrong I have done to you is irreparable. Ah, have not my arms hung round the neck of you, my heart ached for the longing of you? To see you day after day, always humble before you, always glad to kiss the back of your hand! Have I not lived in hell, your highness?" turning to the duke.

"What am I, and who am I?" whispered Hildegard, her heart almost ceasing to beat.

"I am your father."

The Grand Duke of Ehrenstein beheld the chancellor with that phase of astonishment which leaves the mind unclouded. What a project! What a mind to conceive it, to perfect it down to so small a detail as a jeweler's mark in the gold of the locket! And a little finger to betray it! In a flash he saw vividly all this man had undergone day by day, unflinching, unhesitant, forgetting nothing, remembering everything but the one insignificant item which was to overthrow him.

Prince Ludwig took off his hat. "Herbeck, you are a great politician."

"No, prince," replied Herbeck with noble sadness. "Had I been a great politician I should have succeeded. Ah, give this to my merit; self never entered into this dream. It was all done for my child."

Hildegard did not move, nor had she moved since the revelation.

"Hildegard," said the duke, "you shall become my daughter, and you shall dwell here till the end of your days. I will try to right the wrong that has been done to you."

"No, your highness," she replied. "There is but one place for me, and that is at my father's side." And resolutely she walked to the chancellor's left, and her hand stole down and met his firmly. "My father, I forgive you," she said, with quiet dignity.

"You forgive me?" The chancellor could not believe his ears.

"Yes, father."

Then, recalling all the child hunger in his arms and heart, he swept her to his breast convulsively, and the unspoken fears dropped upon her bright head.

"And who am I?" said Gretchen.

"Breunner, you say this little goose girl is my daughter?"

"I solemnly swear it, highness. Look into her face again carefully."

The duke did so, a hand on either cheek. He scrutinized every contour, the color of the eyes, the low, broad brow, the curve of the chin. Out of the past he conjured up the mother's face. Yes, beyond any doubt there was a haunting likeness, and he had never noted it before.

"But who will prove it to the world?" he cried hopelessly, still holding Gretchen's wondering face between his hands.

"I shall prove it," said the king. "You? And how?"

"I shall marry Gretchen. I shall

make her a queen. That will be proof enough."

"A fine stroke, nephew; a bold stroke!" Prince Ludwig laid his hand upon the king's shoulder with rare affection.

"If you accept her without further proof I, her father, can do no less." And the duke led her over to the king, gravely joining their hands.

"Gretchen!" murmured the king. "I do not know how to act like a princess."

"I shall teach you." Gretchen laid her head on his breast. She was very tired and much bewildered.

The duke paced the length of the cabinet several times. No one interrupted his meditation. Back and forth, one hand hanging to the opposite shoulder, the other folding over his chin. Then he paused with abruptness.

"Your majesty," said the grand duke, "I regret that your father is not alive to accept my apologies for so basely misjudging him. Arnstberg, noting that I can do will restore these wasted years. But I offer you the portfolio."

"I am only a broken man, your highness—too old."

"It is my will."

"As for you," said the duke to the gypsy, "go, and if you ever step this side of the frontier again you will be shot out of hand." He stopped again in front of Grumbach. "I promised to have you shot in the morning. That promise holds. But a train leaves for Paris a little after midnight. My advice is for you not to miss it."

"And my father, your highness?" said Hildegard bravely.

"Herbeck, your estates are confiscated; your name is struck from the civic and military lists. Have you any ready funds?"

"A little, your highness."

"Enough to take you forever out of this part of the world?"

"Yes, your highness."

"The grand duke and Herbeck and I like that. You have, perhaps, three

"Gretchen!" murmured the king, hours to get your things in order. Tomorrow you will be judged and condemned. But you, Hildegard—"

"No, your highness; we shall both take the train for Paris. Gretchen, you will be happy."

Gretchen ran and flung herself into Hildegard's arms, and the two of them wept. Hildegard pushed Gretchen away gently.

"Come, father; we have so little time."

And this was the sum of the duke's revenge.

It never took Carmichael long to make up his mind definitely. He found his old friend the cabman in the Platz, and they drove like mad to the consulate. An hour here sufficed to close his diplomatic career and seal it hermetically. The clerk, however, would go on like Tennyson's brook, forever and forever. Next he went to the residence of his banker in the Konigsstrasse and got together all his available funds.

Eleven o'clock found Carmichael in his rooms at the Grand hotel, feverishly packing his trunk and bag. Paris! He would go also even if they passed on to the remote ends of the world.

The train stood waiting in the gloomy Bahnhof. The guards patrolled the platform. Presently three men came out of the station door. Two were officers. The third, Colonel von Wallenstein, was in civilian dress. He was sullen and depressed.

Said one of the officers: "And if it is the express command of General Ducwitz that you will return here under the pain of death, is that explicit?"

"It is." The colonel got into his compartment and slammed the door viciously.

In the next compartment sat Grumbach. He was smoking his faithful pipe. He was withal content. This was far more satisfactory than standing up before the firing line, and, besides, he had made history in Ehrenstein that night. They would not forget the name of Breunner right away. To America with a clean slate and a resolute conscience—it was more than he had any reasonable right to expect. Tekla! He laughed sardonically. She was no doubt sound asleep by this time, and the end of the chapter would never be written for her. What foils these young men a-courting were! War and famine and pestilence—did these not always follow at the heels of women?

As the station master's bell rang the door opened and a man jumped in. He tossed his bag into the corner and plumped down in the seat.

"Captain."

"You, Hans?"

"Yes. Where are you going?"

"I am weary of Dreiberg, so I am taking a little vacation."

"For how long?" suspiciously.

"Oh, for ever so long!" evasively. Hans said nothing more. He was full of wisdom. He had an idea. The fleeing chancellor and his daughter were on the train, and he was certain that his friend Carmichael knew it.

By the aid of certain small bribes on the train and in Paris Carmichael gathered bit by bit that the destination of the woman he loved was America. But never once did he set eyes upon her till she and her father mounted the gangplank to the vessel which was to carry them across the wide Atlantic. The change in Herbeck was pitiable. His face had aged twenty years in these sixty odd hours. His clothes, the same he had worn that ever memorable night, hung loosely about his gaunt frame, and there was a vacancy in his eyes which was eloquent of mental collapse. Carmichael abided his time.

A French newspaper contained a full account of Herbeck's coup and his subsequent flight. It also recounted the excitement of the following day, the appearance of Gretchen on the steps of the palace and the great shouting of the people as they acclaimed her the queen of Jugendheit.

The second day out Carmichael's first opportunity came. He discovered Herbeck and his daughter leaning against the rail. He watched them anxiously, wondering how he might approach without startling her. At last he keyed up his courage.

"Good morning, your highness," he stammered, and inwardly cursed his stupidity.

At the sound of his voice she turned, and there was no mistaking the gladness in her eyes.

"Mr. Carmichael!"

"Yes. I was surprised to learn that you were taking the same boat as myself."

How clumsy he was, she thought. For she had known his every move since the train drew out of Dreiberg.

"Father, here is our friend, Herr Carmichael."

"Carmichael?" said Herbeck slowly. "Ah, yes. Good morning."

And Carmichael instantly comprehended that his name recalled nothing to the other man's remembrance.

"You are returning to America?" she asked.

"For good, perhaps. To tell the truth, I ran away, deserted my post, though technically I have already resigned. But America has been calling me for some days. You have never been to sea before?"

"No; it is all marvelous and strange to me."

"Let us walk, my child," said Herbeck.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Carmichael?" she said. Never more the rides in the fair mornings; never more the beautiful gardens, the music, the galloping of soldiers who drew their sabers whenever they passed her. Never more any of these things.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he said in an undertone.

"No," sadly.

The days, more or less monotonous, went past. Sometimes he saw her alone on deck, but only for a little while. Her father was slowly improving, but with this improvement came the natural desire for seclusion. So he came on deck only at night.

The night on which the vessel bore into the moist, warm air of the gulf stream was full of moonshine, of smooth, phosphorescent billows. Herbeck had gone below. The girl leaned over the rail, alone and lonely. And Carmichael, seeing her, could no longer still the desire in his heart. He came up to her.

"See!" she exclaimed, pointing to the little eddies of foam speeding along the hull. "Do you know what they remind me of? Mermaids' fingers grasping and clutching at the boat as if to drag it down below."

How beautiful she was with the frost of moonlight on her hair!

"You must not talk like that," he admonished.

"I am very unhappy."

"And when you say that you make me so too."

"Why?" She had spoken the word at last.

"Do you remember the night you dropped your fan?" leaning so closely toward her that his arm pressed against hers.

"I remember."

"You put that word then. In honor I dared not answer. You were a princess! I was only a soldier of fortune. But now that you are in trouble, now that you have need of me, I may answer. I may tell you now why, why I have thrown ambition and future to the winds, why I am here at your side tonight. Need I tell you? Do you not know, and have you not known? Am I cruel to speak of love in the moment of your great affliction? Well, I must be cruel. I love you faithfully and loyally, now and hereafter, through this sad day into happier ones. I ask nothing for this love I offer. I ask only that I may use it in your service, in good times or bad."

"Ask what you will."

"I am happy now."

"I am happy now."

"I am happy now."

"I am happy now."

"I am happy now."

"I am happy now."

Fairly warned.

A man who was writing a telegram at one of the long tables in the Western Union building was asked in German by one of two men who stood near him where they could find out how much a telegram to a certain place in the far west would cost. The man volunteered to make the inquiry, did so and returned, saying that they might send a message of ten words for a certain price and that address and signature would not count. After assuring himself that the men could write he walked away, but was stopped at the door by one of the strangers with profuse thanks. "I have been in the city only a few days," he said, "and was told on shipboard and since I landed that everybody would try to swindle me. I spoke to two men today, and both did me a favor. I no longer have any fear." "That's right," said the man, "but, just the same, look out for the third man."—New York Tribune.

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