

The GOOSE GIRL

By HAROLD MacGRATH

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That a wooden shoe, simple and plump, should plunge monarchs and monarchies into a most mysterious confusion of affairs is a novelty. Yet the lovely Gretchen, the heroine of this fascinating old world novel, did just that, for no one can deny that Ehrenstein is a land of romance. There Carmichael, the dashing young American consul, learned of the dangers of falling in love with a princess; there Herbeck, the wily chancellor, tried a master stroke, evilly designed, to change the history of a throne; there royalty in disguise wandered and plotted and learned to know fellow human beings; there the treacherous Major gypsies lurked in the shadows to abduct a princess. And through all the little goose girl trod her lowly way toward a fate that the magic wand of chance had destined she must fill—a fate as amazing as it is fascinating to read about.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE BLACK EAGLE.

HANS GRUMBACH was standing on the curb in front of the Grand Hotel, his back to the sun. It was 9 o'clock. Hans was short, but strongly built—a mild, blue-eyed German, smooth faced, ruddy cheeked, white haired, with a brown button of a nose. Presently two police officers came along and went into the hotel. Grumbach turned with a sigh and followed them. Doubtless they had come to look over his passports. And this happened to be the case. The senior officer unfolded the precious document. "It is not yet vised by your consul," said the officer.

"I arrived last night. I shall see him this morning," replied Grumbach. "You were not born in America?" "Oh, no; I came from Bavaria when twenty."

"Did you go to America with your parents?" "No; I was alone."

"What is your business in America?" "I am a plumber, now retired."

"You are forty?" said the officer, referring to the passports. "As soon as these are approved by his excellency the American consul kindly have a porter bring them over to the bureau of police. It will be only a matter of form. I shall return them at once."

Grumbach produced a Louis Napoleon, which was then, as now, acceptable that side of the Rhine. "Drink a bottle, you and your comrade," he said.

This the officer promised to do forthwith and, followed by his assistant, walked off briskly. Grumbach took of his derby and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Coming up the thoroughfare with a dash of spirit and color was a small troop of horses. Grumbach watched them till they disappeared into the palace courtyard. He called to the waiter.

"Who are they?" "The grand duke and some of his staff, Herr."

low shoes, the two butterflies, a little clock trimmed with emerald, a golden locket shaped like a heart! Grumbach was very fond of music. There was nothing at the opera, so he decided to spend the earlier part of the evening in the public gardens.

Subsequently he found himself standing beside a young vintner and his peasant sweetheart. Their hands secretly met and locked behind their backs. Grumbach sighed. He would always go his way alone.

The girl turned her head. She looked toward the vintner's hand. "Do not mind me, girl," said Grumbach, his face broadening.

The girl laughed easily and without confusion. Her companion, however, flushed under his tan, and a scowl ran over his forehead.

The band was playing "Les Huguenots," and the girl hummed the air. A hand was put upon Grumbach's shoulder authoritatively. The police officer who had examined his passport that morning stood at Grumbach's elbow.

"Herr Grumbach," he said quietly, "his excellency the chancellor has directed me to bring you at once to the palace."

"To the palace?" Grumbach's face was expressive of great astonishment. "My passports were wrong in some respect?"

"Oh, no, Herr. They were correct." Grumbach roused his mind energetically. "But whatever can the chancellor want of me?"

"That is not my business. I was simply sent to find you. His excellency is always interested in German Americans."

"Shall we go at once?" asked Grumbach. "I never expected to enter the palace of the Grand Duke of Ehrenstein," Grumbach added. "It will be something to tell of when I go back to America."

"The palace is lighted up," was Grumbach's comment as the two passed the sentry outside the gates. "The duke gives the dinner to the diplomatic corps tonight."

The majordomo was thunderstruck. He threw back the bolts, and the carter pushed his way in. That ring on the carter's finger!

Vastly subdued, the majordomo preceded the carter into the office of the embassy and went in search of the baron, who was in his study.

"Your excellency, there is a man in the office who desires to see you quickly. A carter!"

The ambassador jumped to his feet. "One moment, your excellency. He wore a ring on his finger, and I could not refuse him."

The majordomo whispered two words. The ambassador rushed from the study. It was dark in the embassy office. Quickly the ambassador lighted some candles.

"Well, your excellency," said a voice from the leather lounge. "Who are you?"

"Who are you?" For this was not the voice the baron expected to hear. "My name at present is not important. The news I bring is far more important. His majesty emphatically declines any alliance with the house of Ehrenstein."

"Damnation!" swore the ambassador. "The exact word used by the prince. Now then, what is to be done?"

"War! It looks as if you and I, baron, shall not accompany the king of Prussia into Alsace-Lorraine."

"This is horrible!" "But what possessed the prince to blunder like this?"

"The price really is not to blame. Our king, baron, is a young colt. A few months ago he gave his royal uncle carte blanche to seek a wife for him. Politics demanded an alliance between Jugendheim and Ehrenstein."



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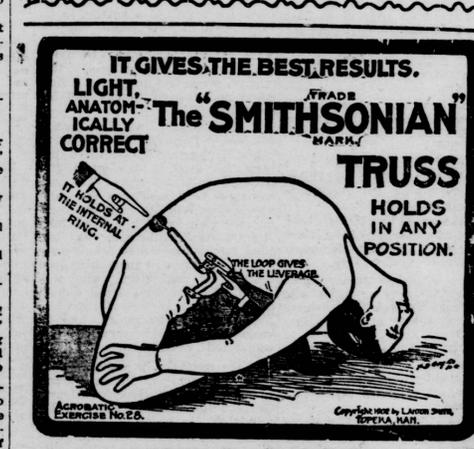
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