

The GOOSE GIRL

By HAROLD MacGRATH

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That a wooden shoe, simple minded goose girl should plunge monarchs and monarchies into a most mysterious confusion of affairs is a novelty. Yet the lovely Gretchen, the heroine of this fascinating oldworld 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 Magyar gypsies larked 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 I SOME IN RAGS.

An old man clothed in picturesque patches and tatters paused and leaned on his stout oak staff. He had walked many miles that day. His peasant garb rather enhanced his fine head. His eyes were blue and clear and farseeing, the eyes of a hunter or a woodsman. The afternoon glow of the September sun burned along the dusty white highway. From where he stood the road trailed off miles behind and wound up 500 feet or more above him to the ancient city of Dreiberg.

side in a kind of temporary crucifixion. Even then the stirrup of the American touched him slightly. But it was not the touch of the stirrup that startled him. It was the dark, clean cut face of the rider. Once they were by the youth darted into a doorway. "He? What can he be doing here? No, it is utterly impossible. It is merely a likeness."

He ventured forth presently, none of the perturbation, however, gone from his face. He ran his hand across his chin. Yes, he would let his beard grow.

The duke and his escort turned into the broad and restful sweep of the Konigsstrasse. At the end was the Ehrenstein Platz, the great square round which ran the palaces and the royal and public gardens. The halt was made in the courtyard and all dismounted.

The American thanked the duke gratefully for the use of the horse. "You are welcome to a mount at all times, Mr. Carmichael," replied the duke pleasantly. "A man who rides as well as yourself may be trusted anywhere with any kind of a horse."

The group looked admiringly at the object of this marked attention. Here was one who had seen two years of constant and terrible warfare, who had ridden horses under fire and who bore on his body many honorable scars, for the great civil strife in America had come to its close but two years before and Europe was still captive to her amazement at the military prowess of the erstwhile inconsiderable American.

As Carmichael saluted and turned to leave the courtyard he threw a swift, searching glance at one of the palace windows. Did the curtain stir? He could not say. He continued on, crossing the Platz, toward the Grand Hotel. He was a bachelor, so he might easily have had his quarters at the consulate, but as usual with American consulates, even to the present time—it was situated in an undesirable part of the town, over a bihallerie frequented by farmers and the middle class.

Where had he seen that young vintner before? Meanwhile the goose girl, now joined by the old man, marshaled her geese and proceeded.

"What was that song you were singing before the horses came up?" he asked her.

"That? It was from the poet Heine"—simply.

"Heine? Can you read?" "Yes, Herr."

"A goose girl who read Heine? And the music?" he inquired presently.

"That is mine"—with the first sign of diffidence. "Melodies are always running through my head. Sometimes they make me forget things I ought to remember."

"Your own music? An impresario will be discovering you some fine day, and your fortune will be made."

The light irony did not escape her. "I am only a goose girl."

He felt disarmed. "What is your name?" "Gretchen."

"What else?" "Nothing else," wistfully.

"I never knew any father or mother."

"I will show you. You are also a stranger in Dreiberg?" "Yes."

They took the next turn, and the weather beaten sign Zum Schwartz Adler, hanging in front of a frame house of many gables, caused the mountaineer to breathe gratefully.

"Here my journey ends, Gretchen, at the Black Eagle," he said.

They were passing a clock mender's shop. The man from Jugendheit peered in the window, but there was no clock in sight to give him warning of the time, and he dared not now look at his watch. He had a glimpse of the ancient clock mender himself, however, huddled over a table upon which sputtered a candle. The eyes of the two men met, but only for a moment. The mountaineer started to cross the street to the tavern.

"Good night, Gretchen. Good luck to you and your geese tomorrow."

"Thanks, Herr Ludwig. And will you be long in the city?" "That depends; perhaps," adding a grim smile in answer to a grim thought.

He offered his hand, which she accepted trustfully. He was a strange old man, but she liked him. When she withdrew her hand something cold and hard remained in her palm. Wonders of all the world, it was a piece of gold! Her eyes went up quickly, but the giver smiled reassuringly and put a finger against his lips.

"But, Herr," she remonstrated. "Keep it. I give it to you. Do not question Providence, and I am her handmaiden just now. Go along with you."

So Gretchen in a mild state of stupefaction turned away. Clat-clat-clat the little wooden shoes. A punitive gong rose and sputtered a laggard from the dark gutter. A piece of gold! Clat-clat-clat! Surely this had been a day of marvels.

She was regarded with kindly eyes till the dark jaws of the Krumerweg swallowed up both her and her geese. "Poor little goose girl!" he thought. "If she but knew she could make a bonfire of a thousand hearts. A fine day!" He eyed again the battered sign. It was then that he discerned another leaning from the ledge of the first story of the house adjoining the tavern. It was the tarnished shield of the United States.

"Two weeks tramping about the country in this unholty garb, following false trails half the time, living on crusts and cold meats! Ah, you have led me a merry dance, nephew, but I shall not forget!"

He entered the tavern and applied for a room, bagging over the price. The nights were chilly. Carmichael in order to finish his cigar on the little balcony fronting his window found it necessary to put on his light overcoat, though he perfectly knew that he was in no manner forced to smoke on the balcony. But the truth was he wanted a clear vision of the gables and the lighted windows thereof, and of one in particular. He had no more sense than Tom Fool, the abettor of follies. She was as far removed from him as the most alien of the planets, but the magnet shall ever draw the needle, and a woman shall ever draw a man. He knew that it was impossible, that it grew more impossible day by day, and he rallied at himself bitterly and satirically.

He sighed and teetered his legs. Carmichael sighed for the Princess Hildegard, understanding that it was sigh or curse, and the latter mode of expression wastes more vitality.

Arthur Carmichael was Irish. He was born in America, educated there and elsewhere—a little while in Paris, a little while at Bonn—and, like all Irishmen, he was banished with the wandering foot, for the man who is homeless by choice has a subtle poison in his blood. He was at Bonn when the civil war came. He went back to America and threw himself into the fight with all the ardor that had made his forbears famous in the service of the worthless, unregarded Carmichael, yet here he was, caring neither for promotion nor exchange. So, then, all logical deductions simmered down to one—cherchez la femme.

The dreamer is invariably tripping over his illusions, and Carmichael was rather boyish in his dreams. What absurd romances he was always weaving round her! What exploits on her behalf! But never anything happened, and never was the grand duke called upon to offer his benediction.

It was all very foolish and romantic and impossible, and no one recognized this more readily than he. No American ever married a princess of a reigning house, and no American ever will. This law is as immovable as the law of gravitation. Still, man is master of his dreams, and he may do as he pleases in the confines of this small circle.

"How the deuce will it end?" musing half aloud. "I'll forget myself some day and trip so hard that they'll be asking Washington for my recall. I'll go over to the gardens and listen to the band."

He was standing in front of the hotel when he noticed a closed carriage hard by the fountain in the Platz.

"Ha, a fare!" A woman in black, thoroughly veiled and cloaked, came round from the opposite side of the fountain. She spoke to the driver. The lady stepped into the carriage, the driver wove up his ancient Bucephalus and went clackety-clack down the Konigsstrasse toward the town. To Carmichael it was less than an incident. He twirled his cane and walked toward the public gardens. The band struck up again, and he drifted with the crowd toward the fountain.

"No, I'll make it five. Turn back and leave me at the Grand hotel." On the return to the hotel the station omnibus had arrived with a solitary guest.

"Your excellency," said the conierge, rubbing his hands, "a compatriot of yours arrived this evening."

"What name?" indifferently. "He is Hans Grumbach of New York."

Within a dozen feet of him, her arms folded across her breast, her eyes half shut in the luxury of the moment, stood the goose girl. He smiled as he recalled the encounter of that afternoon. It was his habit to ride to the maneuvers every day, and several times he had noticed her and her beauty.

"Why couldn't I have fallen in love with some one like this?" he cogitated. Colonel von Wallenstein of the general staff approached her from the other side. Wallenstein was a capital soldier and a jolly fellow round a board, but beyond that Carmichael had no real liking for him. There were too many scented notes stuck in his pockets.

The colonel dropped his cigarette, leaned over Gretchen's shoulder and spoke a few words. At first she gave no heed. The colonel persisted. Without a word in reply she resolutely sought the nearest policeman. Wallenstein, remaining where he was, laughed. Meantime the policeman frowned. His excellency could not possibly have intended any wrong. The law of repress in Ehrenstein had no niche for the goose girl.

"Good evening, colonel," said Carmichael pleasantly. "Why can't your bandmaster give us light opera once in awhile?"

The colonel pulled his mustache in chagrin. "Light operas are rare at present," he replied, accepting his defeat amiably enough.

And then a pretty woman rose from a chair near by. She nodded brightly at the colonel, who bowed, excused himself to Carmichael and made off after her.

Carmichael looked round for Gretchen. She was still at the side of the policeman. She came back.

"Did you get your geese together without mishap?" he asked of her. The instinct of the child always remains with the woman. Gretchen smiled. This young man would be different, she knew.

"They were only frightened." "We don't have goose girls in America," he said.

The magic word America, where the gold came from, flamed her curiosity. "You are from America?" she asked.

"Yes." "Are you rich?" "No, Herr, in dreams," humorously. "Oh, I thought they were all rich. Did you fight in the war?"

"Yes. Do you like music?" "Were you ever wounded?" "A scratch or two. But do you like music?"

"Very, very much. When they play Beethoven, Bach or Meyerbeer—ach, I seem to live in another country. I hear music in everything—in the leaves, the rain, the wind, the stream."

It seemed strange to him that he had not noticed it at first, the almost Homeric purity of her speech and the freedom with which she spoke. The average peasant is ignorant, diffident, with a vocabulary of few words.

"What is your name?" "Gretchen."

"It is a good name. It is famous too." "Goethe used it."

"So he did," Carmichael ably concealed his surprise.

"Not always, my friend. Now, I do not believe that it was absentmindedness which made you step in between me and that pretty goose girl the other night."

"Ah!" Carmichael was all alertness. "It was not, I believe?" "It was coldly premeditated," said Carmichael, folding his arms over his chest. "But that happens to be an innocent guess, Colonel. You're no Herod. You really annoyed her."

"Pretense. They always begin that way. I do not wish any quarrel, my captain. But that girl's face has fascinated me. I propose to see her as often as I like."

"I have no objection to offer. But I told Gretchen that if any one, no matter who, ever offers her disrespect to report the matter to me at the consulate."

"Well, in case she is what you consider insulted what will you do?" a challenge in his tones.

"Report the matter to the police."

"And if the girl finds no redress there?" tranquilly, "to the chancellor."

"An adopted compatriot, it would seem. He'll probably be over to the consulate tomorrow to have his passports looked into. Good night."

So Hans Grumbach passed out of his mind; but, for all that, fortune and opportunity were about to knock on Carmichael's door, for there was a great place in history ready for Hans Grumbach.

(To Be Continued.)

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More Than He Dares. "Oh, love," sighed the sentimental lover, "I would these were the knightly days of old, that I might go forth and perform some brave deed to prove my love."

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Substitute for Hop. It is the Chinaman at home to be weaned from his "hop" and his pipe by the stuff that made Milwaukee famous? It looks that way. A consular report tells of the success of a brewery in Hong Kong, backed by American capital and operated on the latest American lines. It is turning out and selling 100,000 barrels of the most popular American beverage yearly.

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motor, best location in county seat town of 3,000. Address, Lock Box 351, Nevada, Iowa.

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