The Goose Girl

By HAROLD MacGRATH

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CHAPTER XVII.

A LITTLE FINGER.

THE king of Jugendheit, Prince Ludwig and the chancellor sat in the form of a triangle. Herbeck was making a pyramid of his finger tips, sometimes touching his chin with his thumbs. His face was cheerful.

His royal highness, still in the guise of a mountaineer, sat stiffly in his chair, the expression on his face hardly translatable; that on the king's not at all. He was dressed in the brilliant uniform of a colonel in the Prussian uhlans, an honor conferred upon him recently by King William. Prior to his advent into the grand duchy of Ehrenstein he had been to Berlin. A whim for which he was now grateful had cozened him into carrying this uniform along with him on his adventures. It was only after he met Gretchen that there came moments when he forgot he was a king. He was pale. From hour to hour his heart seemed to grow colder and smaller and harder, till it now rested in his breast with the heaviness of a stone, out of which life and the care of living had been squeezed. He rarely spoke, leaving the burden of the conversation to rest upon his uncle's tongue.

"So your royal highness will understand," said Herbeck, "that it was the simplest move I could make and the safest. Were it known or had it been known this morning that the king of Jugendheit and the prince regent had entered Dreiberg in disguise and had been lodged in the Steinschloss there would have been a serious riot in the city. So I had you arrested as spies. Presently a closed carriage will convey you to the frontier and the unfortunate incident will be ended. And when you cross the frontier it would be wise to disperse the troops waiting there for you."

Prince Ludwig smiled. "It was only an army of defense. The duke had nearly 20,000 men at the maneuvers. I have no desire for war; but, on the other hand, I am always ready for it."

"There will never be any war between us," prophetically. "The duke grows impatient at times, but I can always rouse his sense of justice. You will, of course, pardon the move I made. There will be no publicity. There will be no newspaper notoriety, for the journalists will know nothing of what has really happened."

"For that consideration your excellency has my deepest thanks," replied Prince Ludwig.

"I thought it best to let you go without seeing the duke. The meeting between you two might be painful."

"That also is thoughtful of your excellency," said the king. "I have no desire to see or speak to his highness."

"There is, however, one favor I should like to ask," said the prince.

"Can I grant it?"

"Easily. I wish to leave a sum of money in trust to be paid to one Gretchen Schwarz, who lives in the Krumerweg. She is ambitious to become a singer. Let nothing stand between her and her desires."

"Granted."

The heart of the king at the sound of that dear name suddenly expanded and stifled him. The stiffness went out of his shoulders.

"Ah, this little world of ours! The mistakes and futile schemes we make upon it!" The chancellor dallied with his quill pen. "It was a cynical move of fate that your majesty should see the goose girl first."

"Enough!" cried the king vehemently. "Let us have no more retrospection, if you please. Moreover, I shall be obliged to you if you will summon at once the carriage which is to take us to the frontier. The situation has been amicably and satisfactorily explained. I see no reason why we should be detained any longer."

"Nor I," added Prince Ludwig. "I am rather weary of these tatters. I should even like a bath."

The three of them were immediately attracted by a singular noise in the corridor. The door swung in violently, crashing against the wall and shivering into atoms the Venetian mirror. The king, the prince and the chancellor were instantly upon their feet. The king clutched the back of his chair with a grip of iron. Gretchen? Her highness? What was Gretchen doing here? Ah, could he have flown!

The duke came in first, and he waited till the others were inside. Then he shut the door with lesser violence and rushed over to the chancellor.

"Herbeck, you villain!"

The chancellor stared at the gypsy, at Von Arnsberg, at Grumbach.

"Herbeck, you black scoundrel!" cried the duke. "Can you realize how difficult it is not to take you by the throat and strangle you here and now?"

"He is mad!" said Herbeck, bracing himself against the desk.

"Yes. I am mad, but it is the sane madness of a terribly wronged man. Come here, you gypsy!" The duke seized Herbeck's hand and pressed it down fiercely on the desk. "Look at that and tell me if it is not the hand of a Judas!"

"That is the hand, highness," said the gypsy without hesitation.

The duke flung the hand aside. As he did so something snapped in Herbeck's brain, though at that instant he was not conscious of it.

"It was you—you! It was your hand that wrecked my life—yours! Ah, is there such villainy? Are such men born and do they live? My wife dead, my own heart broken, Arnsberg ruined and disgraced! And these two children, which is mine? Villain, what have you to say? What was your purpose?"

How many years, thought Herbeck, had he been preparing for this moment? How long had he been steeling his heart against this very scene? Futile dream! He drew himself together with a supreme effort. He would face this hour as he had always planned to face it. Found out! He looked at his finger, touched it with an impersonal curiosity. He had forgotten all about such a possibility. A little finger to have stopped the wheel of so great a scheme! Irony!

"Your highness," he said, his voice soft and strangely clear, "I have been waiting for this hour. So I am found out! How little we know what God intends!"

"You speak of God? You blaspheme!"

"Bear with me for a space. I shall not hold you long."

"But why? What have I done to you that you should wreck all I hold dear?"

Herbeck fumbled with his collar. "I have practically governed this country for sixteen years. In that time I have made it prosperous and happy. I have given you a substantial treasury. I have made you an army. I have brought peace where you would have brought war. To my people God will witness that I have done my duty as I saw it. One day I fell the victim of a mad dream. And to think that I almost won!"

"And I?" said Hildegarde, her hands clinched and pressed against her bosom. "What have you done to me, who am innocent of any wrong? What have you done to me?"

"You, my child? I have wronged you greatest of all. The wrong I have done to you is irreparable. Ah, have not my arms hungered for the touch 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 Hildegarde, 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, unfaltering, 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 ineffable 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."

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

"Hildegarde," 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 unloosed tears 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. Arnsberg, nothing 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 Hildegarde 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."

"You do not ask to be forgiven, 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, Hildegarde"—

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

Gretchen ran and flung herself into Hildegarde's arms, and the two of them wept. Hildegarde 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 Konigstrasse 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 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 reposeful 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 fools 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 briberies 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 uneasily, 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."

"Ask what you will," she whispered. "I am happy now!"

THE END.

Corn Damaged by Wind.

From Wednesday's Daily.

George Morrow of Memphis, Neb., who has been visiting his sister at Nebraska City for three weeks, stopped a few hours in Plattsmouth en route home today. The hail and wind between here and the City Sunday night caused the corn fields to look as though a roller had been run over them.

Ed. Rynot, Plattsmouth's new druggist, came down from Omaha this morning to make preparations for taking charge of the Gering & Co. drug store which he purchased a few days ago, and will assume control tomorrow. Mr. Rynot has not found a suitable residence but such arrangements are being made today.

STOMACH LIVER LUNGS

Each of the chief organs of the body is a link in the Chain of Life. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, the body no stronger than its weakest organ. If there is weakness of stomach, liver or lungs, there is a weak link in the chain of life which may snap at any time. Often this so-called "weakness" is caused by lack of nutrition, the result of weakness or disease of the stomach and other organs of digestion and nutrition. Diseases and weaknesses of the stomach and its allied organs are cured by the use of Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. When the weak or diseased stomach is cured, diseases of other organs which *seem* remote from the stomach but which have their origin in a diseased condition of the stomach and other organs of digestion and nutrition, are cured also.

The strong man has a strong stomach. Take the above recommended "Discovery" and you may have a strong stomach and a strong body.

GIVEN AWAY.—Dr. Pierce's Common Sense Medical Adviser, new revised Edition, is sent *free* on receipt of stamps to pay expense of mailing *only*. Send 21 one-cent stamps for the book in paper covers, or 31 stamps for the cloth-bound volume. Address Dr. R. V. Pierce, Buffalo, N. Y.

BRINGS SUIT TO RECOVER PROPERTY

Important Law Suit Filed in the District Court of Cass County.

An important law suit was commenced in the district court on the 25th by attorneys Clark & Robertson filing the petition wherein Alice Wells, plaintiff, seeks to recover possession from T. J. Meyers, real estate broker, defendant, to real estate situated in Plattsmouth and Herrick, South Dakota, and also a note of $400 which the plaintiff alleges has been fraudulently obtained through deceitful misrepresentations on the part of the defendant.

The story as set out in the petition, and the wrongs to be righted grew out of an exchange on the part of plaintiff, through Meyers as her agent of a farm in Douglas county for city property. The story goes that defendant made the deal with one Anna V. Johnson, receiving in exchange for the farm and residence property in Plattsmouth being lot five, in block 172, and lots one, two, three, four, five and six in block "J," Herrick, Gregory county, South Dakota, and the note of the husband of said Johnson in the sum of $400. That the defendant procured the deeds to the above described property and the note for $400 to be made to himself and fraudulently concealed the fact that he had received the note and the real estate in South Dakota as a part of the consideration for plaintiff's farm in Douglas county. The plaintiff has a further grievance, that there was personal property in the dwelling on her farm which the defendant had no authority to sell, but which he also conveyed with the land. The petition recites that Mr. Meyers did make a deed of the Plattsmouth residence to plaintiff after the deal, but afterwards induced plaintiff to deed the property to him again, and this deed he still held.

The prayer is for a cancellation of the last deed and for the court to declare plaintiff's title to the note and other real estate good and sufficient. And for judgment for the $100 personal property sold without authority.

Sells Their Store.

M. P. Meisinger who for the past few years has been in the general merchandise business at Benson, associated with Mr. Baker, formerly of Cedar Creek, is in the city today. In conversation with Mr. Meisinger he tells us that they have sold their store at Benson and Mr. Baker has moved to Moorville in the western part of the state. Mr. Meisinger will for the present make Cass county his home, taking up his residence west of Plattsmouth where his brothers and so many relatives reside.

James Loughridge spent the afternoon in the metropolis, having been called there on business of importance today.

THE BASE BALL TOURNAMENT MOVES ALONG

From Wednesday's Daily.

The executive committee of the Plattsmouth Base Ball tournament are moving rapidly and performing their duties well as they go. At the meeting last evening it was decided to hold the tournament on the 14th, 15th and 16th of September, Friday being selected as the closing day owing to the Woodman Log rolling at Weeping Water on the 17th. Manley and Plattsmotuh are billed to play ball at this occasion, but this date had been forgotten until the committee conversed with the Manley team. All dates will be filled and Manley and the Red Sox will play ball in Weeping Water on the 17th and the Plattsmouth tournament will be held on the 14th, 15th and 16th. The committee have also succeeded in securing four teams to fill the series, Tabor, Ia., Manley, Union and Plattsmouth. The prizes have been placed as follows: first money $150 second $100, third $80 and fourth $70. The prizes offered are as high as any offered at any tournament in southwest Iowa the present season, and they boast of offering the best prizes of the entire state so we think that Plattsmouth starts off pretty well in leaping to the top round the first year. This ball meet is planned to be an annual affair, and the Plattsmouth people will exert every effort to give the lovers of the national game their money's worth every day of the meet. Make up your mind now to boost whenever the opportunity is given you, and we will close the first tournament with a grand success in every particular.

Former Residents.

Peter Spader and wife and two boys from Osmond, Neb., arrived in Plattsmouth on Tuesday afternoon of this week for a few days visit with friends and relatives at the old home. They will visit with old friends in and near Murray where they lived for so masy years, also at Murdock where Mr. Spader has an uncle, George Leis and family. From here they will go to Omaha for a few days visit with their brother, Matt Spader and family. Mr. Spader left Cass county a few years ago and moved to Osmond where he has been very successful. He looks hale and hearty and reports things looking very fair where he now resides.

Got Stuck Sunday Evening.

There is nothing like a good team and buggy when one wants to go regardless of the condition of the road. Bob Propst started into Plattsmouth for the doctor with his car just before the storm Sunday evening and when the storm broke and the roads became soft the big engine laid down, or rather the wheels went round so quick they would not propel the car. Bob sent for Q. K. Parmele and a good team and took the doctor to Mynard in short order. Yesterday a team took the big machine back to Mynard.