HAROLD MACGRATH

THE PRINCESS ELOPES

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It is rather difficult in these days for a man who takes such scant interest in foreign affairs—trust a whilom diplomat for that!—to follow the continual geographical disturbances of European surfaces. Thus, I can not distinctly recall the exact location of the Grand Duchy of Barscheit or of the neighboring principality of Doppelkinn. It meets my needs and purposes, however, to say that Berlin and Vienna were easily accessible, and that a three hours' journey would bring you under the shadow of the Carpathian Range, where, in my diplomatic days, I used often to hunt the "bear that walks like a man."

Barscheit was known among her sister states as "the meddler," the "maker of trouble," and the duke as "Old Grumpy"—*Brummbär*. To use a familiar Yankee expression, Barscheit had a finger in every pie. Whenever there was a political broth making, whether in Italy, Germany or Austria, Barscheit would snatch up a ladle and start in. She took care of her own affairs so easily that she had plenty of time to concern herself with the affairs of her neighbors. This is not to advance the opinion that Barscheit was wholly modern; far from it. The fault of Barscheit may be traced back to a certain historical pillar of salt, easily recalled by all those who attended Sunday-school. "Rubbering" is a vulgar phrase, and I disdain to use it.

When a woman looks around it is invariably a portent of trouble; the man forgets his important engagement, and runs amuck, knocking over people, principles and

principalities. If Aspasia had not observed Pericles that memorable day; if there had not been an oblique slant to Calypso's eyes as Ulysses passed her way; if the eager Delilah had not offered favorable comment on Samson's ringlets; in fact, if all the women in history and romance had gone about their affairs as they should have done, what uninteresting reading history would be to-day!

Now, this is a story of a woman who looked around, and of a man who did not keep his appointment on time; out of a grain of sand, a mountain. Of course there might have been other causes, but with these I'm not familiar.

This Duchy of Barscheit is worth looking into. Imagine a country with telegraph and telephone and medieval customs, a country with electric lights, railways, surface-cars, hotel elevators and ancient laws! Something of the customs of the duchy must be told in the passing, though, for my part, I am vigorously against explanatory passages in stories of action. Barscheit bristled with militarism; the little man always imitates the big one, but lacks the big man's excuses. Militarism entered into and overshadowed the civic laws.

There were three things you might do without offense; you might bathe, eat and sleep, only you must not sleep out loud. The citizen of Barscheit was hemmed in by a set of laws which had their birth in the dark dungeons of the Inquisition. They congealed the blood of a man born and bred in a commercial country. If you broke a law, you were relentlessly punished; there was no mercy. In America we make laws and then hide them in dull-looking volumes which the public have neither the time nor the inclination to

read. In this duchy of mine it was different; you ran into a law on every corner, in every park, in every public building: little oblong signs, enameled, which told you that you could *not* do something or other—"Forbidden!" The beauty of German laws is that when you learn all the things that you can not do, you begin to find out that the things you can do are not worth a hang in the doing.

As soon as a person learned to read he or she began life by reading these laws. If you could not read, so much the worse for you; you had to pay a guide who charged you almost as much as the full cost of the fine.

The opposition political party in the United States is always howling militarism, without the slightest idea of what militarism really is. One side, please, in Barscheit, when an officer comes along, or take the consequences. If you carelessly bumped into him, you were knocked down. If you objected, you were arrested. If you struck back, ten to one you received a beating with the flat of a saber. And never, never mistake the soldiery for the police; that is to say, never ask an officer to direct you to any place. This is regarded in the light of an insult. The cub-lieutenants do more to keep a passable sidewalk—for the passage of said cub-lieutenants—than all the magistrates put together. How they used to swagger up and down the Königsstrasse, around the Platz, in and out of the restaurants! I remember doing some side-stepping myself, and I was a diplomat, supposed to be immune from the rank discourtesies of the military. But that was early in my career.

In a year not so remote as not to be readily recalled, the United States packed me off to Barscheit because I had an

uncle who was a senator. Some papers were given me, the permission to hang out a shingle reading "American Consul," and the promise of my board and keep. My amusements were to be paid out of my own pocket. Straightway I purchased three horses, found a capable Japanese valet, and selected a cozy house near the barracks, which stood west of the Volksgarten, on a pretty lake. A beautiful road ran around this body of water, and it wasn't long ere the officers began to pass comments on the riding of "that wild American." As I detest what is known as park-riding, you may very well believe that I circled the lake at a clip which must have opened the eyes of the easy-going officers. I grew quite chummy with a few of them; and I may speak of occasions when I did not step off the sidewalk as they came along. A man does more toward gaining the affection of foreigners by giving a good dinner now and then than by international law. I gained considerable fame by my little dinners at Müller's Rathskeller, under the Continental Hotel.

Six months passed, during which I rode, read, drove and dined, the actual labors of the consulate being cared for by a German clerk who knew more about the business than I did.

By this you will observe that diplomacy has degenerated into the gentle art of exciting jaded palates and of scribbling one's name across passports; I know of no better definition. I forget what the largess of my office was.

Presently there were terrible doings. The old reigning grand duke desired peace of mind; and moving determinedly toward this end, he declared in public that his

niece, the young and tender Princess Hildegarde, should wed the Prince of Doppelkinn, whose vineyards gave him a fine income. This was finality; the avuncular guardian had waited long enough for his wilful ward to make up her mind as to the selection of a suitable husband; now *he* determined to take a hand in the matter. And you shall see how well he managed it.

It is scarcely necessary for me to state that her Highness had her own ideas of what a husband should be like, gathered, no doubt, from execrable translations from "Ouida" and the gentle Miss Braddon. A girl of twenty usually has a formidable regard for romance, and the princess was fully up to the manner of her kind. If she could not marry romantically, she refused to marry at all.

I can readily appreciate her uncle's perturbation. I do not know how many princelings she thrust into utter darkness. She would *never* marry a man who wore glasses; this one was too tall, that one too short; and when one happened along who was without visible earmarks or signs of being shop-worn her refusal was based upon just—"Because!"—a weapon as invincible as the fabled spear of Parsifal. She had spurned the addresses of Prince Mischler, laughed at those of the Count of ——— - ——— (the short dash indicates the presence of a hyphen) and General Muerrisch, of the emperor's body-guard, who was, I'm sure, good enough—in his own opinion—for any woman. Every train brought to the capital some suitor with a consonated, hyphenated name and a pedigree as long as a bore's idea of a funny story. But the princess did not care for pedigrees that were squint-eyed or bow-legged. One and all of them she cast aside as

unworthy her consideration. Then, like the ancient worm, the duke turned. She should marry Doppelkinn, who, having no wife to do the honors in his castle, was wholly agreeable.

The Prince of Doppelkinn reigned over the neighboring principality. If you stood in the middle of it and were a baseball player, you could throw a stone across the frontier in any direction. But the vineyards were among the finest in Europe. The prince was a widower, and among his own people was affectionately styled "*der Rotnäsig*," which, I believe, designates an illuminated proboscis. When he wasn't fishing for rainbow trout he was sleeping in his cellars. He was often missing at the monthly reviews, but nobody ever worried; they knew where to find him. And besides, he might just as well sleep in his cellars as in his carriage, for he never rode a horse if he could get out of doing so. He was really good-natured and easy-going, so long as no one crossed him severely; and you could tell him a joke once and depend upon his understanding it immediately, which is more than I can say for the duke.

Years and years ago the prince had had a son; but at the tender age of three the boy had run away from the castle confines, and no one ever heard of him again. The enemies of the prince whispered among themselves that the boy had run away to escape compulsory military service, but the boy's age precluded this accusation. The prince advertised, after the fashion of those times, sent out detectives and notified his various brothers; but his trouble went for nothing. Not the slightest trace of the boy could be found. So he was mourned for a season, regretted and then forgotten; the prince adopted the grape-arbor.

I saw the prince once. I do not blame the Princess Hildegarde for her rebellion. The prince was not only old; he was fat and ugly, with little, elephant-like eyes that were always vein-shot, restless and full of mischief. He might have made a good father, but I have nothing to prove this. Those bottles of sparkling Moselle which he failed to dispose of to the American trade he gave to his brother in Barscheit or drank himself. He was sixty-eight years old.

A nephew, three times removed, was waiting for the day when he should wabble around in the prince's shoes. He was a lieutenant in the duke's body-guard, a quick-tempered, heady chap. Well, he never wabbled around in his uncle's shoes, for he never got the chance.

I hadn't been in Barscheit a week before I heard a great deal about the princess. She was a famous horsewoman. This made me extremely anxious to meet her. Yet for nearly six months I never even got so much as a glimpse of her. Half of the six months she was traveling through Austria, and the other half she kept out of my way,—not intentionally; she knew nothing of my existence; simply, fate moved us about blindly. At court, she was invariably indisposed, and at the first court ball she retired before I arrived. I got up at all times, galloped over all roads, but never did I see her. She rode alone, too, part of the time.

The one picture of her which I was lucky enough to see had been taken when she was six, and meant nothing to me in the way of identification. For all I knew I might have passed her on the road. She became to me the Princess in the Invisible Cloak, passing me often and doubtless deriding my efforts to discern her. My curiosity became alarming. I

couldn't sleep for the thought of her. Finally we met, but the meeting was a great surprise to us both. This meeting happened during the great hubbub of which I have just written; and at the same time I met another who had great weight in my future affairs.

The princess and I became rather well acquainted. I was not a gentleman, according to her code, but, in the historic words of the drug clerk, I was something just as good. She honored me with a frank, disinterested friendship, which still exists. I have yet among my fading souvenirs of diplomatic service half a dozen notes commanding me to get up at dawn and ride around the lake, something like sixteen miles. She was almost as reckless a rider as myself. She was truly a famous rider, and a woman who sits well on a horse can never be aught but graceful. She was, in fact, youthful and charming, with the most magnificent black eyes I ever beheld in a Teutonic head; witty, besides, and a songstress of no ordinary talent. If I had been in love with her—which I solemnly vow I was not!—I should have called her beautiful and exhausted my store of complimentary adjectives.

The basic cause of all this turmoil, about which I am to spin my narrative, lay in her education. I hold that a German princess should never be educated save as a German. By this I mean to convey that her education should not go beyond German literature, German history, German veneration of laws, German manners and German passivity and docility. The Princess Hildegarde had been educated in England and France, which simplifies everything, or, I should say, to be exact, complicates everything.

She possessed a healthy contempt for that what-d'-ye-call-it that hedges in a king. Having mingled with English-speaking people, she returned to her native land, her brain filled with the importance of feminine liberty of thought and action. Hence, she became the bramble that prodded the grand duke whichever way he turned. His days were filled with horrors, his nights with mares which did not have box-stalls in his stables.

Never could he anticipate her in anything. On that day he placed guards around the palace she wrote verses or read modern fiction; the moment he relaxed his vigilance she was away on some heart-rending escapade. Didn't she scandalize the nobility by dressing up as a hussar and riding her famous black Mecklenburg cross-country? Hadn't she flirted outrageously with the French attaché and deliberately turned her back on the Russian minister, at the very moment, too, when negotiations were going on between Russia and Barscheit relative to a small piece of land in the Balkans? And, most terrible of all to relate, hadn't she ridden a shining bicycle up the Königsstrasse, in broad daylight, and in bifurcated skirts, besides? I shall never forget the indignation of the press at the time of this last escapade, the stroke of apoplexy which threatened the duke, and the room with the barred window which the princess occupied one whole week.

They burned the offensive bicycle in the courtyard of the palace, ceremoniously, too, and the princess had witnessed this solemn *auto da fé* from her barred window. It is no strain upon the imagination to conjure up the picture of her fine rage, her threatening hands, her compressed lips, her

tearless, flashing eyes, as she saw her beautiful new wheel writhe and twist on the blazing fagots. But what the deuce was a poor duke to do with a niece like this?

For a time I feared that the United States and the Grand Duchy of Barscheit would sever diplomatic relations. The bicycle was, unfortunately, of American make, and the manufacturers wrote to me personally that they considered themselves grossly insulted over the action of the duke. Diplomatic notes were exchanged, and I finally prevailed upon the duke to state that he held the wheel harmless and that his anger had been directed solely against his niece. This letter was duly forwarded to the manufacturers, who, after the manner of their kind, carefully altered the phrasing and used it in their magazine advertisements. They were so far appeased that they offered me my selection from the private stock. Happily the duke never read anything but the *Fliegende Blätter* and *Jugend*, and thus war was averted.

Later an automobile agent visited the town—at the secret bidding of her Highness—but he was so unceremoniously hustled over the frontier that his teeth must have rattled like a dancer's castanets. It was a great country for expeditiousness, as you will find, if you do me the honor to follow me to the end.

So the grand duke swore that his niece should wed Doppelkinn, and the princess vowed that she would not. The man who had charge of my horses said that one of the palace maids had recounted to him a dialogue which had taken place between the duke and his niece. As I was anxious to be off on the road I was compelled to listen to his gossip.