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MUSSELMAN
98 Dundas Street.

The Queen's Veil.

The morning following the incidents just related, while Ernest, Lord Holborn, was sitting over his breakfast with his friend, Count Henri Beauharnais, a servant came to him, bringing a tiny package on a salver.

"What may this dainty thing be?" he inquired, as he took it, and looked at it with a puzzled expression.

"Then, as he instantly recognized that delicate tracery, upon the wrapper, as identical with that upon the card he had picked up in Monsieur La Fort's office the day before, the blood tinged to his very finger tips, and leaped to the roots of his dark hair.

He tore it open, wondering what it could contain, and lo! there lay his seal—a highly-prized gift from his mother. He had only that morning discovered his loss. He held it out to his friend with a smile of pleasure.

"I never thought to see it again," he said.

"Who has found it? Who has returned it?" questioned the count.

"There is no message, no name—nothing to tell me the finder was."

Ernest Holborn replied, examining the wrapper with rising color; and yet in his own mind he was convinced that he was indebted to no other than the lovely girl in whom he had been so deeply interested the day before.

"Doubtless it dropped from my chain while we were at the lace manufactory yesterday," he said, "and some one has expressed it to me from there."

"But it is addressed in a lady's hand, and such a pretty hand, too, upon my word," returned his friend, reaching out and taking the paper from him.

"It was doubtless directed by Monsieur's orders, but I saw it in his camp," said the young lord.

"But how could anyone know that you were the loser?" persisted Count Beauharnais, with a puzzled look.

"My initials and coat-of-arms are engraved on the seal," responded Lord Holborn, who was also puzzled by the same question.

"But I did not introduce you; how could they know you or where to send to?"

"We will not trouble ourselves as to the how of the matter so long as I have the seal once more," Ernest replied, with more indifference than he really felt, while he fastened the trinket in its place upon the chain. But for several days the incident was not absent from his mind, while he, too, strove to solve the mystery of its having been sent to the proper destination.

Meanwhile, Tina was busily engaged upon her designs for the royal finery, and they grew and blossomed into such a city that she could scarcely contain his delight and excitement.

He decided that Tina should direct and control the work of the workshop of her own designs. This plan virtually displaced Madame Fouchard, as far as Tina's designs were concerned, and of course, the older employee was highly indignant. She remonstrated with Monsieur La Fort, and threatened to give up her position.

This threat, however, proved of no force whatever; therefore Madame Fouchard reconsidered her determination and concluded to remain. She so placed herself by fawning vengeance against the unsuspecting Tina.

CHAPTER VI.

In a luxurious room of one of the imperial palaces of Berlin, there sat one day before opening of our story, two maidens, engaged in an excited and bitter controversy.

Both were apparently of the same age, although there was really three years difference in the date of their birth—one being sixteen the other nineteen.

One was a bright, beautiful girl, whose every movement was full of grace and vivacity; although at this time her face was overcast with sadness and anxiety, while her eyes were suffused with tears.

Her companion, on the other hand, was rather plain, and, just now, with the expression of anger and jealousy upon her face, she was absolutely repulsive.

"I tell you," she cried to the fair girl opposite her, "you are just as treacherous as you can be. He never would have bestowed upon you that magnificent gift if you had not worked upon his feelings, and artfully wound and insinuated yourself into his favor. Perhaps you are trying to supersede me in his regard—perhaps you even aspire to become his grace's bride—yes!" and the scornful laugh which accompanied this bitter sentence brought the bright color in a sudden wave to the fair face of her listener.

"Marie, how can you wrong me so?" the elder girl asked, gently, yet with dignity; "you well know that his grace feels only a friendly interest in me upon your account, and perhaps for the slight favor which it befel me to render him. Indeed, I have given you the credit of having confided to him my orphanage and state of dependence, and had even suggested the nature of the gift."

"Not I; for I have long seen through your arts; you have seized every opportunity to put yourself in his way, and have practiced your airs and graces upon him, as you do upon everyone, until, if this thing goes on, he will soon give me—his betrothed—the cold shoulder. Are you not ashamed of yourself—you, who but for the generosity of others, would be an outcast and a beggar?" passionately retorted the enraged girl.

"I am a gentlewoman, your ladyship, and with some of the proudest blood in the land in my veins, as you well know," quietly returned the maiden who had been so abused.

"Ha, ha! granted on your mother's side; but what of your father, my would-be lady?" retorted the Princess Marie Charlotte, for the angry, bitter words which we have recorded, proceeded from no other than she; and it was in her boudoir—a charming room, all furnished in blue and silver, in King Leopold's summer palace—that this conversation occurred.

"It is true," she resumed, after pausing to take breath, for she was excited, "that you are the child of my mother's, the queen's, cousin—the most intimate and dearly beloved friend; but who, to her sorrow, disgraced herself, while residing in Florence, by eloping with an unknown artist. You have been told all the incidents of that disgraceful episode, but I do not wish you to forget either them or yourself. Where is your gratitude for the past that you should turn against me and try to steal my lover from me?" where is your sense of honor that you wrong me thus?"

The elder girl, who was known at the court of Belgium as the Lady Althea Demaire—a distant relative and protégée of the queen—arose at those last bitter words, and gliding to the side of the princess knelt upon an ottoman.

Laying one white hand gently upon her shoulder, she said, pleadingly: "Marie, you and I have loved each other too fondly during the years that we have lived together, to quarrel and be at enmity during this, the last one that we shall probably ever spend in this world's society. What has come over you?—You are not wont to be so unjust, so unkind! Never before have you taunted me with the unhappy mystery surrounding my birth. But you are excited, and I will not quarrel with you; only I pray you let nothing come between us now. I declare to you that I had no thought of wrong in my heart toward you, and I have never dreamed of striving to usurp your place in the favor of his grace, the archduke of Austria. How could you imagine such a thing?"

"I have not imagined it," interrupted the princess, sullenly.

"Hear me out, dear," please," returned the Lady Althea, gently. "I have rejoiced with you over your present future, and that your hand is a rich solicited of the king by one so noble and worthy as the duke, and I have prayed—O pray, daily—for your happiness. Dearest Marie, believe me, and let us be at peace."

"At peace," was the bitter reply; "you are trying to cheat your present joy with your soft glances and your smoothly spoken words;" and the young princess shrugged that white hand rudely from her shoulder.

"I know you are false to me," she resumed, but avoiding these sweet, reproachful eyes—yes, to me, but for whom, since your royal mother's death, you would have been homeless and alone in the world; and now your treachery—"

"Marie, I swear—"

"You need not swear; for I have the evidence of my eyes. I saw you engaged in earnest, private conversation with his grace, the duke, at the entrance to the witness' grove, last night."

The Lady Althea colored, and a slight start betrayed the surprise that this information caused her.

"Yes, we did stop for a moment before the grove last night, but only for a moment; we had been to see the luminous of the palm-house, with some of the royal guests, as you know, and on our way back we lingered to look at the fountain!" interrupted the princess, with a scornful laugh.

"Yes, it was very pretty with the colored light from the palm-house shining on it," Lady Althea replied, quietly, although the deepening flush upon her cheek betrayed that she was not wholly at her ease.

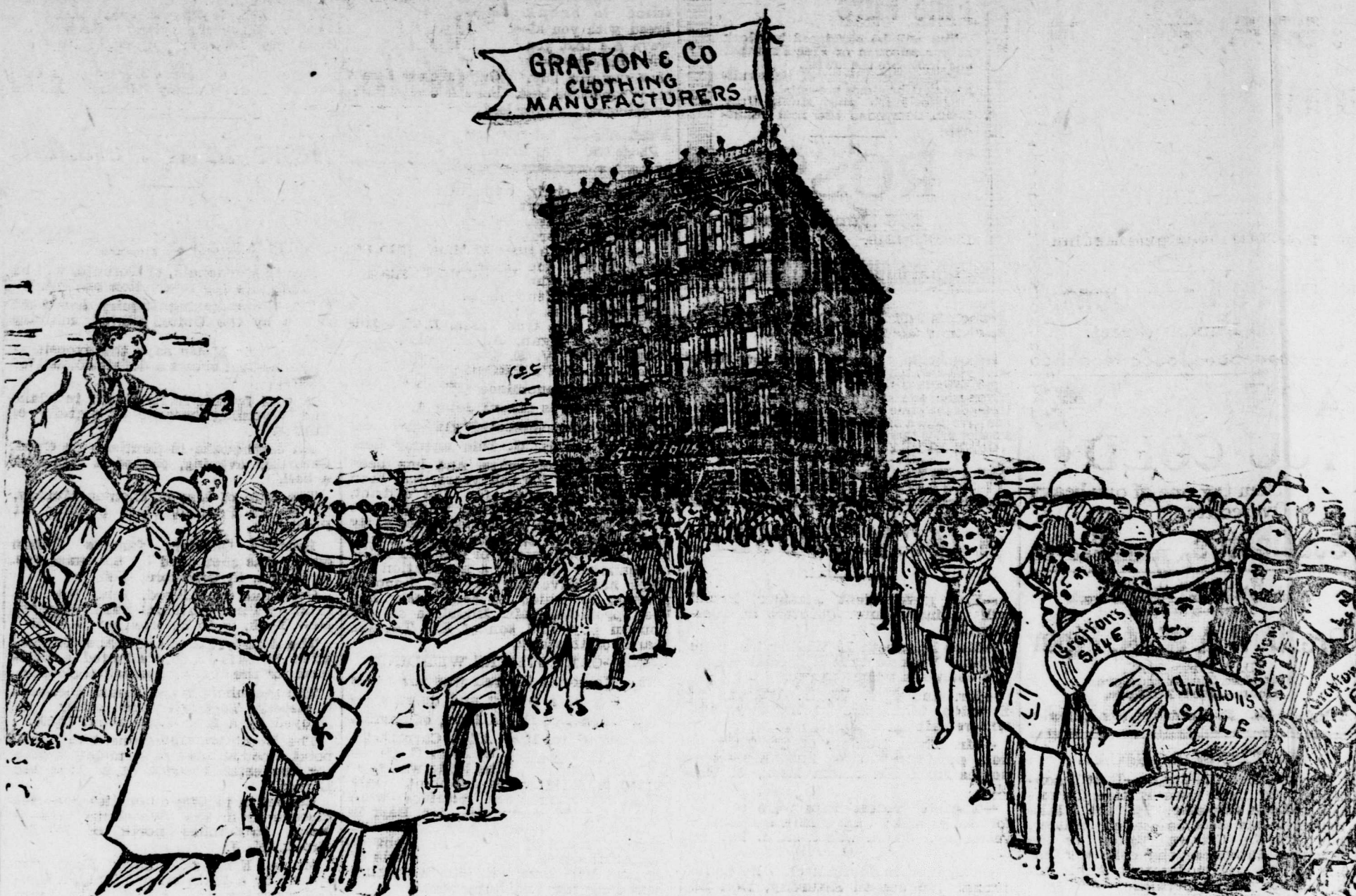
"Do you suppose that I believe this absurd story, Althea Demaire? I was in the witness' grove when you passed before it with your noble escort last night, said the young princess, bending toward her companion, her eyes ablaze with anger.

"You, Marie!" cried the girl at her side, with a startled look; "but you sent me word, when I sent a servant to ask you to accompany us, that you were unable to go out into the evening air."

"That is very true; but my recovery was very rapid when I saw you leave the palace accompanied by my lover—why does he always seek you when I am out of sight? I stole out—I followed you, and hid in the witness' grove until your return. I heard his grace speak to you of his gift, asking you to accept it as a slight token of his appreciation of the great service you have rendered him and for the favor which you were yet to grant him. I heard him, too, charge you that it should remain a secret from me. Have I not a right to believe you false, treacherous, double-tongued, when you will meet my lover in secret, and connive against me? What is this secret between you two? I demand it of you now, and unless you are the cheat and coquette that I believe you, you will tell me what it means."

(To be Continued.)

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