

THE SEVENTH MARCHIONESS OF RIVIÈRE.

A PSYCHICAL INTERLUDE.

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"BEYOND THE WORLD'S MOST PURPLE RIM."

A monstrous wise peasant woman, speaking to Andrea at this time, said—"The sperrit's like Jack in the box; when it gets above wi' itsen corpus must clap down the lid—corpus is nowt but a taller candle; come fire, and it melts away. Down yon fire wi' wuk, me dear; it's the Lord's own damper."

This advice was quite in accord with the girl's own determination, but she sighed as she recalled the sheaf of family letters—all kind in their intention, no doubt—expressing in language more or less febrilic, the gross impropriety, and certain loss of caste of a lady working for her living—letters best consigned unanswered, thought Andrea, to the kitchen fire. So up the flues their wraiths took flight!

Then Uncle George had been deputed by the family to read the "Riot Act," which consisted in his, once and for all, putting down his very manly foot on the parlour mat, the meanwhile agitating his coat tails before the empty grate—and in simple Saxon, forbidding, in his capacity of guardian, any divergence from the straight path of propriety laid down for county families. A career for a woman! Stuff and nonsense—career, indeed! Marriage was woman's only decent career, and why not reconsider the excellent proposal—

Andrea, who had apparently been listening with becoming humility, now crossed the room and stood facing Uncle George—very white, with pink nostrils fluttering.

"Now listen!" she said, very quietly,—and he did with his mouth open. "My body is my own. What I choose it to do—it will do—I choose to create with my brains—I choose to manipulate with my hands,—I decline to sell even one pound of flesh—don't dare ever again to suggest that I become unclean." That clenched it. It would. Here was woman incarnate—woman militant.

What power could crush her?

Uncle George trembled—his bald pate flushed pink—he felt furious, as with strong drink—

His impulse was to strike, but he dared not.

"Poor old beastie!" thought Andrea, "how difficult it must be to restrain tooth and claw!" Aloud she said, soothingly:

"There are so many forces stronger than we are, which must be obeyed; don't let us worry about them.—I hear you have invented a new mangel-wurzel—come into the garden, and tell me about it!"

Thus come flattery, come vanity, and peace was restored.

And from family interference Andrea was free.

When the day came to leave Carillon, Andrea went early into the stable yard. The old coachman was grooming "t'ode" pony—to those

sibilant sounds appropriate to the occasion. "Don't bring the carriage round to the front gate," she said, "just take the luggage and land it at the station, I will pick it up some time. I shall walk across the fields—as if I just go out without a hat, and take my own time—I might be coming back again, don't you think?"

"Well," replied the old man, "there are those as is fust rate at play-acting—and you be one of 'em. Must us say good-bye now Miss Andrie?"

"There is no harm in it," said Andrea. "God bless you—fare you well—such sayings have a sweet sound, but it is best just to flit away." Thus saying, she turned and passed into the kitchen garden, and the old man who had known her all her life stood and watched her go slowly through the orchard, rich with rosy fruit, and so out of sight.

She never looked back.

She went for the last time down the avenue of chestnuts—over the little, white bridge—saw the dace and gudgeon flitting hither and thither in the clear pool below, and through the pastures to the mill. Here she stood for long, very still and silent. It was a dim, sweet September day. Carillon lay embowered in trees—the sun making fiery flames on the western windows.

"Hearts patch," thought Andrea.

Then she tied on her hat and veil—and walked resolutely over the hill to the station.

Her boxes were on the platform.

"Where shall I label 'em to?" enquired the youthful porter.

"Mecca," said Andrea, smiling.

"Ain't got a ticket for no such a place," replied the boy, knitting his brows.

"Oh! yes you have—some day you will want to go there too," she told him, "but London will do; it is on the way."

A few minutes later Andrea was rushing towards that ever-receding horizon, that purple rim, beyond which lies the Mecca of the imagination—far, far beyond a gentle Vale, dominated by the most lordly Beauvais!

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In spite of every platitude, without money you can never be free. Yet unless you are possessed of the vagrant spirit, freedom hath no charms.

This spirit whispered to Andrea "let us wander," so together they mounted a broom stick and sailed away into the empyrean.

Duty they left lamenting—knowing full well that, like the proverbial toad, she could at any time be found beneath the harrow, rejoicing in the toothpicks their desertion had left her to endure.

Just for a breathing space, pastures new. Then to work.

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(To be continued.)

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