

THE SEVENTH MARCHIONESS OF RIVIÈRE.

A PSYCHICAL INTERLUDE.

(Continued from page 76.)

INSTINCT THE INFALLIBLE.

The Duchess sent her letter by hand, thus it was impressed with a *cachet* mere passage through the post, fingered by the casual, could never have conferred upon it. As Andrea held it between finger and thumb she perceived it to be a missive deserving of delicate handling; like the wing of a dove, it was softly grey, the strawberry leaves embossed in silver. To have inserted her finger under the flap, and thrust it rudely open was not to be thought of—so she rose from the deep window seat where she had been dreaming in the sun, and with an ivory knife opened it with as little injury as possible.

The sheet when exposed contained but a few lines, and informed her in the third person that the Duchess of Beauvais would call upon Miss Carillon on the afternoon of that day, to convey to her in person the ducal condolences upon the death of her esteemed father—who was held in such sincere respect, not only throughout the district—but by the Party of which he had always been so distinguished a member. Furthermore if not quite convenient and agreeable for Miss Carillon to receive her, the Duchess would be pleased to receive a reply to that effect by bearer. A stately and gracious communication, clearly inscribed, yet it rested on the girl's lap for quite five minutes before she rose to reply to it. Then she answered that she was deeply sensible of the courtesy extended to the memory of her dear father—and contrary to instinct the infallible—she added that she would await the visit of the Duchess at her own pleasure.

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A few hours later she heard the swift whirl of carriage wheels through the village street—and saw a little lady descend from a magnificent barouche at the garden gate. A little lady who came stately and slow along the flagged path leaning on an ebony stick. To receive her at the open hall door had been Andrea's intention—but physical weakness made instant appeal to her heart—so she ran out, and awaiting no greeting, she offered her strong young arm to the feeble figure—and guided her guest into the grey parlour, where, seated on the Hepplewhite couch—nothing could have been more harmonious than her silvery satin gown and bonnet, and black lace scarf.

"A very great little beautiful lady," thought Andrea.

"A dangerously lovely, fateful creature," surmised the Duchess.

After an exchange of social courtesies they took tea together, then the Duchess suddenly asked:

"You know why I came?"

"In part," the girl replied directly. "You are mystified—you want light—I will help you all I know."

The Duchess drew aside her voluminous skirt "Come and sit beside me and let me hold your hand," she said—"it is a very vital hand—I want to speak with you without reserve—and my confidence to be sacred between you and me."

Andrea came and shared the sofa, she took the beautiful bejewelled hand held out to her and clasped it between her own brown supple palms.

"Now tell me," she said softly,

"It is about my children I would speak," said the little lady wistfully—"my twin sons—both ardently loved—so alike in feature—yet so essentially unlike in temperament. Two splendid bodies—yet *one only in soul*. My dear first-born, for ever mourned, was a man of marvellous mentality, chivalrous, a patriot, poet, artist, and a lover of mankind. His brother—before all things a man of affairs—most generous—kind, the soul of honour—one the complement of the other, and most devotedly attached. Of that most awful, swift and appalling death—no mother must speak—such things are in the hands of God, time may bring solace—everything passes—but there seems no solace anywhere—no rest, and I have come to you for help—"

Bending her head, Andrea raised the pretty jewelled fingers to her lips and kissed them.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because of the picture—it was not only a supreme artist, but a great lover who painted your portrait."

Andrea rose and stood looking down at the Duchess, her eyes calm and luminous.

"I know nothing of it," she said—"once only in this life I met Lord Rivière—years ago—"

"And—?"

"A few times we have met in dreams."

"You loved my son?"

"Ah! Yes, indeed—indeed," answered Andrea "I loved him instantly—absolutely—then—now—for ever and for ever. There is no power can coerce my soul in its loving."

"That is so" sighed the Duchess, rising—"you may flee into the desert—or to the eternal snows—your body may be eaten of worms—and your soul descend into Hell—yet will his soul follow after, and find joy of you. That is the Law. *Already my first-born has come out of his grave—* And now, dear child, give me your strong arm, there is power in it. Take me to my carriage. I am very feeble."

"Remember" said Andrea at parting "all I can do, I will do—to save others sorrow. It is well with me—love is mine."

The prancing horses stepped high and bore away the great little lady.

Andrea closed the gate—and turned towards the setting sun.

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(To be continued.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)