

1. III. THE APPOINTMENT

'Well,' said he, 'here we are, arrived at the fag-end of my holiday. What a pleasant surprise my old home, which I have not thought worth coming to see for three or four years, had in store for me!'

'You must go to-morrow?' she asked uneasily.

'Yes.'

Something seemed to overweigh them; something more than the natural sadness of a parting which was not to be long; and he decided that instead of leaving in the daytime as he had intended, he would defer his departure till night, and go by the mail-train from Budmouth. This would give him time to look into his father's quarries, and enable her, if she chose, to walk with him along the beach as far as to Henry the Eighth's Castle above the sands, where they could linger and watch the moon rise over the sea. She said she thought she could come.

So after spending the next day with his father in the quarries Jocelyn prepared to leave, and at the time appointed set out from the stone house of his birth in this stone isle to walk to Budmouth-Regis by the path along the beach, Avice having some time earlier gone down to see some friends in the Street of Wells, which was halfway towards the spot of their tryst. The descent soon brought him to the pebble bank, and leaving behind him the last houses of the isle, and the ruins of the village destroyed by the November gale of 1824, he struck out along the narrow thread of land. When he had walked a hundred yards he stopped, turned aside to the pebble ridge which walled out the sea, and sat down to wait for her.

Between him and the lights of the ships riding at anchor in the roadstead two men passed slowly in the direction he intended to pursue. One of them recognized Jocelyn, and bade him good-night, adding, 'Wish you joy, sir, of your choice, and hope the wedden will be soon!'

'Thank you, Seaborn. Well--we shall see what Christmas will do towards bringing it about.'

'My wife opened upon it this mornen: "Please God, I'll up and see that there wedden," says she, "knowing 'em both from their crawling days."'

The men moved on, and when they were out of Pierston's hearing the one who had not spoken said to his friend, 'Who was that young kimberlin? He don't seem one o' we.'

'Oh, he is, though, every inch o' en. He's Mr. Jocelyn Pierston, the stwone-merchant's only son up at East Quarriers. He's to be married to

a stylish young body; her mother, a widow woman, carries on the same business as well as she can; but their trade is not a twentieth part of Pierston's. He's worth thousands and thousands, they say, though 'a do live on in the same wold way up in the same wold house. This son is doen great things in London as a ' image-carver; and I can mind when, as a boy, 'a first took to carving soldiers out o' bits o' stwone from the soft-bed of his father's quarries; and then 'a made a set o' stwonen chess-men, and so 'a got on. He's quite the gent in London, they tell me; and the wonder is that 'a cared to come back here and pick up little Avice Caro--nice maid as she is notwithstanding.... Hullo! there's to be a change in the weather soon.'

Meanwhile the subject of their remarks waited at the appointed place till seven o'clock, the hour named between himself and his affianced, had struck. Almost at the moment he saw a figure coming forward from the last lamp at the bottom of the hill. But the figure speedily resolved itself into that of a boy, who, advancing to Jocelyn, inquired if he were Mr. Pierston, and handed him a note.