

## 2. VII. THE NEW BECOMES ESTABLISHED

A few mornings later he was looking through an upper back window over a screened part of the garden. The door beneath him opened, and a figure appeared tripping forth. She went round out of sight to where the gardener was at work, and presently returned with a bunch of green stuff fluttering in each hand. It was Avice, her dark hair now braided up snugly under a cap. She sailed on with a rapt and unconscious face, her thoughts a thousand removes from him.

How she had suddenly come to be an inmate of his own house he could not understand, till he recalled the fact that he had given the castle servants a whole holiday to attend a review of the yeomanry in the watering-place over the bay, on their stating that they could provide a temporary substitute to stay in the house. They had evidently called in Avice. To his great pleasure he discovered their opinion of his requirements to be such a mean one that they had called in no one else.

The Spirit, as she seemed to him, brought his lunch into the room where he was writing, and he beheld her uncover it. She went to the window to adjust a blind which had slipped, and he had a good view of her profile. It was not unlike that of one of the three goddesses in Rubens's 'Judgment of Paris,' and in contour was nigh perfection. But it was in her full face that the vision of her mother was most apparent.

'Did you cook all this, Avice?' he asked, arousing himself.

She turned and half-smiled, merely murmuring, 'Yes, sir.'

Well he knew the arrangement of those white teeth. In the junction of two of the upper ones there was a slight irregularity; no stranger would have noticed it, nor would he, but that he knew of the same mark in her mother's mouth, and looked for it here. Till Avice the Second had revealed it this moment by her smile, he had never beheld that mark since the parting from Avice the First, when she had smiled under his kiss as the copy had done now.

Next morning, when dressing, he heard her through the rickety floor of the building engaged in conversation with the other servants. Having by this time regularly installed herself as the exponent of the Long-pursued--as one who, by no initiative of his own, had been chosen by some superior Power as the vehicle of her next debut, she attracted him by the cadences of her voice; she would suddenly drop it to a rich whisper of roguishness, when the slight rural monotony of its narrative speech disappeared, and soul and heart--or what seemed soul and heart--resounded. The charm lay in the intervals, using that word in its musical sense. She would say a few syllables in one note, and end her sentence in a soft modulation upwards, then downwards, then into her

own note again. The curve of sound was as artistic as any line of beauty ever struck by his pencil--as satisfying as the curves of her who was the World's Desire.

The subject of her discourse he cared nothing about--it was no more his interest than his concern. He took special pains that in catching her voice he might not comprehend her words. To the tones he had a right, none to the articulations. By degrees he could not exist long without this sound.

On Sunday evening he found that she went to church. He followed behind her over the open road, keeping his eye on the little hat with its bunch of cock's feathers as on a star. When she had passed in Pierston observed her position and took a seat behind her.

Engaged in the study of her ear and the nape of her white neck, he suddenly became aware of the presence of a lady still further ahead in the aisle, whose attire, though of black materials in the quietest form, was of a cut which rather suggested London than this Ultima Thule. For the minute he forgot, in his curiosity, that Avice intervened. The lady turned her head somewhat, and, though she was veiled with unusual thickness for the season, he seemed to recognize Nichola Pine-Avon in the form.

Why should Mrs. Pine-Avon be there? Pierston asked himself, if it should, indeed, be she.

The end of the service saw his attention again concentrated on Avice to such a degree that at the critical moment of moving out he forgot the mysterious lady in front of her, and found that she had left the church by the side-door. Supposing it to have been Mrs. Pine-Avon, she would probably be discovered staying at one of the hotels at the watering-place over the bay, and to have come along the Pebble-bank to the island as so many did, for an evening drive. For the present, however, the explanation was not forthcoming; and he did not seek it.

When he emerged from the church the great placid eye of the lighthouse at the Beal Point was open, and he moved thitherward a few steps to escape Nichola, or her double, and the rest of the congregation. Turning at length, he hastened homeward along the now deserted trackway, intending to overtake the revitalized Avice. But he could see nothing of her, and concluded that she had walked too fast for him. Arrived at his own gate he paused a moment, and perceived that Avice's little freehold was still in darkness. She had not come.

He retraced his steps, but could not find her, the only persons on the road being a man and his wife, as he knew them to be though he could not see them, from the words of the man--

'If you had not a'ready married me, you'd cut my acquaintance! That's a pretty thing for a wife to say!'

The remark struck his ear unpleasantly, and by-and-by he went back again. Avice's cottage was now lighted: she must have come round by the other road. Satisfied that she was safely domiciled for the night he opened the gate of Sylvania Castle and retired to his room also.

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Eastward from the grounds the cliffs were rugged and the view of the opposite coast picturesque in the extreme. A little door from the lawn gave him immediate access to the rocks and shore on this side. Without the door was a dip-well of pure water, which possibly had supplied the inmates of the adjoining and now ruinous Red King's castle at the time of its erection. On a sunny morning he was meditating here when he discerned a figure on the shore below spreading white linen upon the pebbly strand.

Jocelyn descended. Avice, as he had supposed, had now returned to her own occupation. Her shapely pink arms, though slight, were plump enough to show dimples at the elbows, and were set off by her purple cotton print, which the shore-breeze licked and tantalized. He stood near, without speaking. The wind dragged a shirt-sleeve from the 'popples' or pebble which held it down. Pierston stooped and put a heavier one in its place.

'Thank you,' she said quietly. She turned up her hazel eyes, and seemed gratified to perceive that her assistant was Pierston. She had plainly been so wrapped in her own thoughts--gloomy thoughts, by their signs--that she had not considered him till then.

The young girl continued to converse with him in friendly frankness, showing neither ardour nor shyness. As for love--it was evidently further from her mind than even death and dissolution.

When one of the sheets became intractable Jocelyn said, 'Do you hold it down, and I'll put the popples.'

She acquiesced, and in placing a pebble his hand touched hers.

It was a young hand, rather long and thin, a little damp and coddled from her slopping. In setting down the last stone he laid it, by a pure accident, rather heavily on her fingers.

'I am very, very sorry!' Jocelyn exclaimed. 'O, I have bruised the skin, Avice!' He seized her fingers to examine the damage done.

'No, sir, you haven't!' she cried luminously, allowing him to retain her hand without the least objection. 'Why--that's where I scratched it this morning with a pin. You didn't hurt me a bit with the popple-stone!'

Although her gown was purple, there was a little black crape bow upon each arm. He knew what it meant, and it saddened him. 'Do you ever visit your mother's grave?' he asked.

'Yes, sir, sometimes. I am going there tonight to water the daisies.'

She had now finished here, and they parted. That evening, when the sky was red, he emerged by the garden-door and passed her house. The blinds were not down, and he could see her sewing within. While he paused she sprang up as if she had forgotten the hour, and tossed on her hat. Jocelyn strode ahead and round the corner, and was halfway up the straggling street before he discerned her little figure behind him.

He hastened past the lads and young women with clinking buckets who were drawing water from the fountains by the wayside, and took the direction of the church. With the disappearance of the sun the lighthouse had again set up its flame against the sky, the dark church rising in the foreground. Here he allowed her to overtake him.

'You loved your mother much?' said Jocelyn.

'I did, sir; of course I did,' said the girl, who tripped so lightly that it seemed he might have carried her on his hand.

Pierston wished to say, 'So did I,' but did not like to disclose events which she, apparently, never guessed. Avice fell into thought, and continued--

'Mother had a very sad life for some time when she was about as old as I. I should not like mine to be as hers. Her young man proved false to her because she wouldn't agree to meet him one night, and it grieved mother almost all her life. I wouldn't ha' fretted about him, if I'd been she. She would never name his name, but I know he was a wicked, cruel man; and I hate to think of him.'

After this he could not go into the churchyard with her, and walked onward alone to the south of the isle. He was wretched for hours. Yet he would not have stood where he did stand in the ranks of an imaginative profession if he had not been at the mercy of every haunting of the fancy that can beset man. It was in his weaknesses as a citizen and

a national-unit that his strength lay as an artist, and he felt it childish to complain of susceptibilities not only innate but cultivated.

But he was paying dearly enough for his Liliths. He saw a terrible vengeance ahead. What had he done to be tormented like this? The Beloved, after flitting from Nichola Pine-Avon to the phantom of a dead woman whom he never adored in her lifetime, had taken up her abode in the living representative of the dead, with a permanence of hold which the absolute indifference of that little brown-eyed representative only seemed to intensify.

Did he really wish to proceed to marriage with this chit of a girl? He did: the wish had come at last. It was true that as he studied her he saw defects in addition to her social insufficiencies. Judgment, hoodwinked as it was, told him that she was colder in nature, commoner in character, than that well read, bright little woman Avice the First. But twenty years make a difference in ideals, and the added demands of middle-age in physical form are more than balanced by its concessions as to the spiritual content. He looked at himself in the glass, and felt glad at those inner deficiencies in Avice which formerly would have impelled him to reject her.

There was a strange difference in his regard of his present folly and of his love in his youthful time. Now he could be mad with method, knowing it to be madness: then he was compelled to make believe his madness wisdom. In those days any flash of reason upon his loved one's imperfections was blurred over hastily and with fear. Such penetrative vision now did not cool him. He knew he was the creature of a tendency; and passively acquiesced.

To use a practical eye, it appeared that, as he had once thought, this Caro family--though it might not for centuries, or ever, furbish up an individual nature which would exactly, ideally, supplement his own imperfect one and round with it the perfect whole--was yet the only family he had ever met, or was likely to meet, which possessed the materials for her making. It was as if the Caros had found the clay but not the potter, while other families whose daughters might attract him had found the potter but not the clay.