Avalyn

By : R J Symons

Based in the 18th Century, Avalyn is about a Baroness who uses music to help her escape. A very talented composer and oppressed by her husband, Avalyn develops a secret life. Meanwhile, the Baron's on going conflict with his brother finally comes to a fatal climax, effecting everyone in the family.

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The distressed cries of a misused wife resonate through the hallways. Two footmen stand either side of the ivory and gold double doors. This is a sound they have heard too often. Both handsome and tall, Thomas slowly spins his head to look at his counterpart. His face perturbed by this all too knowing cry from the Baron's wife. Harvey responds with a sharp shake of his head and they both continue to look forward, trying to ignore the painful cries from a struggling woman. Eventually the woman's cries are extinguished and all that is left is the sound of an obese, grunting rapist.

The husband rolls off his younger, attractive wife and wipes his sweaty face with her bed sheets. He begins to dress and tucks his white shirt into his trousers. The wife lays naked and defeated. She pulls the covers over her porcelain skin; she only manages to grasp enough cover to hide her modesty. Her ample bosom and large hips spill from the sides of the sheet but her tiny waist is covered as her hands wrap themselves around herself. He looks at his dishevelled wife just before he opens the doors.

'Clean yourself up, we have guests arriving soon.'ï¿½ He leaves.

Alone in her bedroom Avalyn pulls on a nightgown. She walks to her wooden dressing table and sits in front of the three large mirrors. She stares for a short while into the middle mirror. Her porcelain cheek is reddened from a hand and her orange hair is no longer in the neat and tidy state it once was. She knows what must be done; she had to do this process twice last week and once the week before. In fact she couldn't remember a week where she didn't have to go through this process at least once a week, especially after their marriage.

Before they were married he would treat her with respect even in private, not that they were allowed alone often. She reaches over and picks up a silver hand mirror, she doesn't look in it. She places the cool silver onto her cheek. Her right elbow resting on the dressing table as the hand holds it in place. After a short while she removes it, glances in the mirror and the red skin is slowly becoming pale white again. She begins pulling pins from her hair and placing them onto a small silver tray, she then picks up her hairbrush and begins to tame her orange locks. Once brushed, her hair falls to her shoulders. Every action seems to be executed in slow motion, almost rehearsed. Her dazed look dissolves fast when a knock on the door is heard.

'Come in,' she announces.

A maid hurries in.

'Your husband sent me to help you get ready; your guests will be arriving soon.'

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Chapter one

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Avalyn looks around the large wooden table for better conversation, the gathering is only a small one this evening as her husband has only invited her mother Laura, two business men she is not well acquainted with and her husband's brother. Thankfully she is dragged back into a discussion with her brother in-law Charles, he is the only one she knows except for her mother and truthfully he is a strangely interesting distraction. He is half the size of his older brother and has a certain ostentatious and overly flamboyant character. His little finger extends every time he takes a sip from his glass.

'I never liked Wales,' he says 'a ghastly rainy place.'

'I adore it there, the cottage is by the sea and the peace and quiet is wonderful. I love that no one really knows you're there,' she retorts. 'Also, it does not always rain dear brother.'

'How have you ever talked my brother into going there?'

'I haven't, he won't come. It's my mother's cottage so I tend to go there with her.'

'He has always been a stubborn bastard.'

The Baron peers over his leg of meat and doesn't look pleased. Charles ignores the piercing looks from his brother and continues to talk.

'Even when he was a child, as the eldest boy he always presumed he would get certain privileges.'

'Privileges? How so?' She probes.

'He would think that he was the most handsome. Which, of course he was not. That title was clearly mine. He would think that he was the best at sports. Which, again he was not. He was a chubby child so it was not really a fair competition.'

'Charles you're terrible,' she giggles.

'He would often... no, always state that he had twisted his ankle or that he had come down with some unknown disease, which of course meant he could not finish the race, and that he would have to sit on the floor and pant out of breath.'

The Baron is not happy; he stares at his irritating and attention seeking brother.

'What are you saying brother?' His tone stern.

'Nothing that isn't true dear brother,' Charles smirks.

It has always been his favourite past time, to wind up his brother and make him look silly in front of other people. The animosity has grown more intensely over the past years. Since their father died, Charles found it hard to accept his brother in the Baron position. Although he knew this was inevitable. After all, his brother was first born. Charles had thought; or more truthfully hoped that his brother would have died long ago, from over indulging in his favourite past time: food and wine. Or that he would get murdered as he was not very well thought of in England. The Baron is often thought of as; aggressive, overbearing with his opinions and

not an easy man to please. This information was well hidden from Avalyn before their marriage.

Her mother, whom was widowed the year before, had pushed as hard as possible for the marriage, stopping just short of losing her dignity. She was lucky that her daughter was beautiful, full figured, child bearing hips and skin smooth and pale white. Avalyn is an only child in a family with an extremely overbearing mother. Of course there is much love there, but Avalyn sometimes wished for a break, sometime to herself.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ When her mother had first approached the idea with her, she reeled of an impressive list of the Baron's qualities. Unlike most other eligible females in the country, Avalyn knew nothing of her future husband. She had been home schooled by her mother and spent most of her time playing and learning the piano from visiting music masters. She knew everything about the instrument; she had even learnt how to write her own compositions. So when her mother had finished reeling off the Baron's many talents and his extremely impressive monetary assets, Avalyn could only think to herself: *I can finally get out of this house and see the world.* They were married one month later. Avalyn was not attracted to the Baron. However, being so innocent and after having read too many love stories, her naivety led her to believe that love would come after they were wed.

It was on their wedding night she saw his true colours. He had seemed so polite, yes a little cold and not very forthcoming with his feelings, but he had treated her well and with kindness. Before they were married she would have been horrified if a man had spoken to her the way he had, especially in the bedroom. He was not a caring and sweet lover, like her mother had promised. He was aggressive, sadistic almost. He even had to explain exactly what he wanted her to do. He had only had sex with prostitutes before Avalyn. He always presumed; *If I'm paying, they can do exactly what I want.* Sadly that's how he felt about Avalyn, he was paying for her to live in the house, for her to be his Wife. Therefore, if he wants her to perform certain acts; she will obey.ï¿½

The Baron, whom is sitting next to Avlyn's mother, addresses the table sternly.

'I apologize for my brother; he likes to invite himself to these soirees to get away from the boredom of bachelorhood.'

Laura joins in with the ribbing of Charles. Asking him when he will give up his life of being a bachelor and settle down with a well-mannered and handsome woman. This sparks Avalyn's interest as she has tried to set him up once before. She was soon shot down by her husband. Always discarding her matches; not handsome enough or their nobility was not up to scratch.

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ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'But she is very talented on the pianoforte, she can paint and she is funny,' Avalyn tries her best.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'My brother does not need to marry a court jester. Can't you see he is enough "funny" all on his own,' his answer is dryly executed.

Avalyn's mother attempts to steer the conversation into another direction.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'Avalyn dear, how is your pianoforte? Still practicing I hope.'

Before Avalyn has a chance to draw enough breath for a response, her husband answers for her.

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Laura looks confused. 'How so?'

Avalyn quickly interjects, 'I like to play my own music. I find it interesting; piecing together notes, what sounds beautiful or what sounds fascinating.'

Avalyn quickly regrets saying this. Her mother never did approve of her writing her own music. When she was younger she would add her own notes to well-known pieces, just to hear how it would sound. This piqued her interest and so she began to notate her own compositions. Of course her mother did not support this. Avalyn was taught by a visiting music master. Her mother had once again lobbied on behalf of her daughter. She wanted the best tutor they could afford. Laura knew; if her daughter was accomplished in the art of pianoforte, needlepoint and French; she would find a good husband, a wealthy husband. First she learnt needlepoint and French, as pianos were a rarity when Avalyn was a child. Only families from considerable wealth and nobility would have them in their homes.

Laura came from money, her father owned a large estate and she in turn was able to marry into money. Avalyn's Father had inherited a substantial amount of money when his uncle had passed away leaving no direct heirs. Being the only other male in the family still alive he inherited everything. He was a kind and generous man, his first priority was to make sure his Aunt was well looked after. She lived in the home with them for many years until she died of illness. When they moved into the large estate once owned by his uncle the piano was there. It was a gift from some dignitaries from Italy. His uncle had also been a kind man and had been involved in business with the Italians for several years. They in turn gifted him with a piano.

His wife learnt to play and she would entertain her husband. Him sitting in a large armchair; with a whiskey and cigar, and her at the piano. The thought often brought a tear to her eyes when she was to play after his death, this stopped her playing. She couldn't bring herself to press even one note and the lid stayed closed for years. It wasn't until Avalyn was born and old enough to sit up straight that the lid was opened. She taught Avalyn the basics and they would often duet on simple songs. When her Aunt passed away Laura started to hunt for a replacement teacher. She knew the talent Avalyn had could not go unchallenged. She loved her daughter's talent, but she was still a lady of a certain standing, therefore she had to be strict.ï¿½ï¿½ ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'You shouldn't be wasting your time on such frivolities,' she says with a roll of her eyes.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'Indeed,' the Baron exclaims. 'Listen to your mother. Anyways there is a reason why all the great composers are all men. What do women know about music?'

ï¿½Charles and the other men snigger in agreement with the Baron. Avalyn doesn't look daunted by her husband's comments. She knows he is a chauvinist and has had to put with ridiculous remarks like these since their wedding day.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'Mostly women play. I or another lady would play in this household. It is similar in other households. In fact I would be as bold to say...' She knows she has gone too far. A stern look has enveloped the Baron's eyes. He angles them straight into her eyes. The Baron did not need telepathy; he could talk to Avalyn without any words. This look says; *no more speaking*. If there is one thing a chauvinist despises; it is being shown up by a woman, especially their own wife. She pauses and stares at her husband. She stops talking.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'Please, dear sister continue. You were about to say something bold I believe,' Charles stares at his brother feeling smug. Avalyn takes a moment to think. If she continues he will hit her tonight. However, he already has the look in his eyes.

ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'I would be as bold to say that no man has even touched the piano in this household, and if you were to sit at one you would not know what to do.' She exhales slowly.

The Baron laughs off the comment. Without any witty response available, he only says 'we men have better things to do.'

Charles however cannot resist prying more conflict out of this situation. 'Avalyn what do you or these other women play?'

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ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½ 'You can't argue with that dear wife.' The smugness oozes from his every word. He moves his conversation swiftly to Laura. 'However, it is occupying her. I suppose even women need their hobbies.'

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