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## MY CREOLES:

A MEMOIR OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY.

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## Book VI.

## REPARATION AND ABNEGATION.

## I.

## THE ADVANTAGE OF A DELAY.

At the conclusion of the stipulated two months I was ready for Uncle Pascal. I closed my book with a slam, put up my papers, threw myself back in my easy chair and uttered a loud shout of triumph. Then with a sharp look at the ceiling, and to make sure of it for the last time, I asked myself whether I was thoroughly prepared to undertake the great task destined for me. The answer was prompt and decisive.

"Yes, and I am going at once to tell Uncle Pascal so."

The old man dearly loved pluck. It was the quality which had made him what he was and still kept alive in him the fiery spirit of youth. He received me grandly.

"And are you really ready, my boy?" he asked, standing up and straightening his little figure briskly. "I wish I knew enough to examine you myself. I have a notion to bring you up before a board of inquisitors. But no, I take your word for it, Carey. I see it in your eye. All is well. You will have the place and will make your way."

"The time is up, Uncle Pascal; I stand before you in heavy marching order. When do we start?"

"Ah! not so quick, young man. Soldiers must insure themselves to disappointment. I had given you two months; I now give you at least two months more before taking the field. The winter has been against us. It will be impossible to commence our operations before the frost gets out of the ground. Hence, you will remain in camp a while longer. You are not displeased, Carey? Not, if I believe certain rumours. Two months more with the girls, eh? That is a consideration. But you will not remain idle. On the contrary, there is plenty of work to be done. All our machinery has to be constructed, ready to be set up in early spring. Here your new knowledge will come in. We shall want you to draw out the plans and specifications. The engines will be made according to your directions. You will have to inspect their gradual growth at the works. We rely upon you implicitly. A great responsibility rests upon your shoulders. You vouch for yourself to me. I will vouch for you to the company."

"When do we begin?"

"At once. I have been waiting for you. There were shoals of applicants for your position, but I put them off. I said to the directors: 'Let us wait for Archimedes!'"

The gay old man was right in guessing that I had no objection to the delay. Rather was it a godsend to us all—to me, to Ory, to Mimi, to M. Paladine. My approaching departure had cast a gloom at The Quarries. It would have occurred precisely at the moment when the most important, and perhaps the most interesting events were about to take place there—events in which I was more or less concerned.

When I informed M. Paladine of the counter-orders I had received, he was delighted.

"Ah!" said he, "that is the best thing which has happened to me for a long time. If your future had not been at stake, I would have retained you at all hazards. But now that the change comes of itself, I hail it as a good omen. Bonair is returning. I will wait you here to meet him. Early in spring he will start for the Mountains. Between his coming and his going serious matters will have to be settled. For these, Carey, we shall need your assistance."

Then the old gentleman, assuming a more solemn manner, added:

"Remember, Nani's six months have expired."

## II.

## THE WORK OF CONSCIENCE.

I was sitting one evening in my office, with rule and compass in hand, when some one rapped softly at the door and entered without waiting for an answer. The room, beyond the narrow circle of light at my desk, being filled with gloom, I could not distinguish who he was.

"Mr. Gilbert, excuse me for thus stealing on you," said he in a hoarse tone.

I recognized the voice of Bonair Paladine. I arose and gave him my hand.

"No excuse, M. Paladine. I am glad to see you. When did you arrive?"

"Just this moment. Only took time to inquire where I might find you, and came down directly. How are they at The Quarries?"

"All well and anxiously expecting you."

"And father?"

"As I wrote to you, animated by the best dispositions."

Bonair seeming disposed to linger a moment, I offered him a chair and resumed my seat. He was neatly dressed, bore no marks of travel, looked smart and in good health. The only circumstance I noticed was that he appeared nervous and preoccupied.

"I must beg your pardon for the liberty I took about that letter," he said after a time.

I assured him the matter was of no consequence.

"Your reply was very consoling," he continued. "It determined my return. Here I am, but before proceeding further, I must ask you another service. Indeed, unless you grant it, I don't know how I will act."

I at once inquired what he demanded.

"It may look foolish, sir, after what you wrote. But I can't help it. I came from New York here, boldly and confidently. But now that I am almost at the gates of The Quarries, I lose heart and dare not go on. Will you come with me?"

"Is that all?" I said, smiling. "I will do so with pleasure."

"I see you are busy; I can wait and gather my wits a little."

My work was pressing, but I did not tell him so. Figuring to myself the delight which his return would occasion at The Quarries, I should have deemed myself guilty of selfishness if I had retarded it a moment longer than was necessary. I therefore told Bonair that I was ready to depart on the instant. So, hastily putting my room to rights, slipping on my overcoat and extinguishing the lamp, I led the way into the street.

"Let us walk it," said my companion, "if it's the same to you. I prefer that, as it will warm my sluggish and cowardly blood. I have some little luggage, but it will be sent out from the hotel to-morrow."

On the way his spirits rose considerably. He related to me the adventures of his journey, some of them very comical. He explained, too, the nature of the business which he had transacted in New York. He had there been very successful. Several of his arrangements, distinguished by uncommon sagacity and a rare spirit of enterprise, seemed to open out prospects of great financial success. If he could get his father to enter into his plans and advance him the money, he had no doubt about making a large and rapid fortune in the fur trade which he intended to revolutionize. I encouraged him, of course, expressing my belief that he need have no misgivings about his father's good will.

When we reached the gate of The Quarries he suddenly stopped short, as if a new thought had struck him. Bending to my ear, he asked:

"Mr. Gilbert tell me, is Gaisso at home?"

I answered that she was.

He then drew back a few paces, saying:

"Then I had better not go in."

"It is too late to retreat now," I urged.

"Take courage. What have you to fear?"

Slowly and reluctantly he followed me into the park. When we came in sight of the house, we found it wrapped in darkness. Bonair hesitated again. Plucking my sleeve and speaking close to my ear, he said:

"I am not expected to-night, that is evident. My sudden appearance may disturb the family. It did so terribly six months ago, when I returned from the mountains. Gaisso had then to be put out of the way. It may be the same way now. That girl and I must not meet under the same roof. So it seems ordained. She was the cause of my last outbreak with my father. I wish not to give the slightest pretext for a misunderstanding now. And, further, to be candid, I cannot face the girl after the frightful words I used about her on the day when I last left this house. I need say no more, for I presume that you know all about it."

I tried to draw him on, but in vain.

"Go in first, as on an ordinary visit. See how things stand. Mention my name. Announce my arrival. Mark what effect that will make. Father is very impressionable, as you know. If he is not taken aback with the news; if he is not at all troubled, then please summon me in. If, on the contrary, he is in any way disturbed or put out, it will be a sign that he has not taken his last precautions to receive me. In that case, leave me where I am. I will wait for you here and we will return to the city together."

"Sir," said I, with assurance, "Take one thing for granted. Your father and sister have been expecting you for the last fortnight. If Gaisso is still at The Quarries, it is because she is wanted there, and that your father has no intention of removing her."

I spoke thus positively because I knew that, in consideration of Bonair's threats and of the danger to which she had been exposed, M. Paladine would not let Gaisso out of his sight any more.

As, however, Bonair, still unpersuaded, insisted on my going in alone, I did so.

## III.

## I PREPARE THE WAY.

It was Gaisso herself who opened the door. She was dressed in full toilet, looking very well indeed. I excused myself on being a little late, and asked whether I could see M. Paladine and his daughter.

Ory, who was probably listening at the head of the stairs, came down in haste to meet me. She appeared somewhat surprised.

"From what I told you last night," I said, merrily, "you did not expect me this evening. But I have changed my mind, you see."

"Oh, it is not so late," she replied. "Eight has only just struck. We were all sitting up. Papa is reading in his study. Come; I will lead you to him."

As I entered, the old man, laying down his book and stretching forth his hand, exclaimed:

"Carey has news for us—I see it in his face. Sit down, my boy, and tell us what it is."

Ory remained standing in the middle of the room. I saw the black dress of Gaisso in the angle of the open door.

"Well, yes. I have news for you all, and good news, too."

"What is it?" was the unanimous cry.

"Bonair has arrived."

Ory gave a little scream of joy, feebly echoed by Gaisso.

M. Paladine asked eagerly:

"How is he?"

"Perfectly well."

"Then why did he not come with you?"

"He preferred I should announce his arrival."

"Poor Bonair! He still fears," murmured Ory.

"Where is he?" inquired M. Paladine.

"What means this mistrust? We have all been holding ourselves in readiness to meet him night and day these two weeks. We are all ready to meet him now."

"You are all ready?" I responded, looking around.

"Why, certainly," said the old man with some impatience.

"Then come with me," I exclaimed, laughing heartily.

We all went forth into the hall, which was now fully lighted. I opened the door wide. I saw Bonair standing under the portico, in the shadow of a pillar. Taking him by the shoulder I ushered him into the house. He threw himself into his father's arms, and embraced his sister tenderly. He presented his hand to Gaisso with stately courtesy.

"Now," said M. Paladine, "let us spend a happy evening."

## IV.

## THE KISS OF PEACE.

A fortnight later I learned from Djim that Bonair had arrived at a final agreement with the fur company. All his propositions, such as he had stated them in the first interview with the firm, had been accepted. He became a partner in the concern, and was to be lord and master in the new ground which he had chosen for his operations.

The old man had come down handsomely. Bonair had demanded \$20,000 to build and stock his fort; M. Paladine wrote out a check for \$20,000. The company required a guarantee of \$10,000 for the completion of the work and its maintenance during the first twelve months. M. Paladine deposited that amount in the Bank of Missouri, subject to their order.

The old gentleman had to be present at the signing of the act of partnership and other notarial papers. For that purpose he undertook one of his rare excursions to the city. He profited by that opportunity to make a call on my mother, who received him with the utmost cordiality. He also did me the honor of visiting my office. What took place on that occasion was too characteristic to be omitted here.

It so happened that Uncle Pascal was with me examining some plans which I had drawn up for him. He was in capital humor, joking, telling stories, humming snatches of tunes, jumping up from his chair, stamping his feet, pulling my ears.

In the midst of this noise I heard carriage-wheels stop at my door, and soon after heavy steps ascending my little stairs. Then followed a loud rap to which I answered as loudly.

The door opened. M. Paladine made his appearance. The eyes of the two old men met and flashed. They then bowed profoundly to each other in the courtly fashion of two duellists about to cross swords.

"Excuse me, Carey," said M. Paladine. "You are engaged. I will call some other time."

Uncle Pascal, seizing his hat and turning to me, immediately added:

"Excuse me, Carey, I will not detain you. I will return some other time."

I felt like laughing, but I durst not, for the matter had its serious as well as its comical aspect. I knew that M. Paladine would feel hurt if I did not receive him. I was certain that my Uncle Pascal would never forgive me if I accepted his leave. What was I to do? Having no time to deliberate, I resolved on the first plan that came to my head. That was to play the innocent and to affect to ignore the estrangement of the patriarchs. I therefore arose, protested that there was room enough in my office for both of them, and proceeded to a solemn introduction. The old men remained pe-

trified at my effrontery. They both looked at me with eyes full of admiration. I bore the fire of their glance like a hero. Uncle Pascal was the first to speak, and he addressed M. Paladine:

"This boy has more sense than either of us. He has satirized us a master. What do you say, Paladine? Let us both come him for his impudence then shake hands over it. Here goes, though I am the elder."

M. Paladine seized the proffered hand, pressing it fervently.

"There now, you young rascal, are you satisfied?" said Uncle Pascal, threatening me with his cane.

The two ancients then drifted into a pleasant chat, recalling the stories of old times. Uncle Pascal did most of the talking. M. Paladine listened and laughed. He seemed perfectly happy. They parted from each other as if they had always been friends, and promised to meet again.

This little incident raised me in the esteem of both the old men.

Adverting to it a few days later, Uncle Pascal said:

"That was a good lesson you taught me, Carey. At eighty and still pluming myself on my sense, I ought to have known that the prejudices of our youth are contemptible. I never really hated Hector Paladine. He never did me a mite of injury that I remember. I avoided him because others did so. I black-guarded him because it amused my friends and pleased their petty malice. Paladine is not a perfect man, by any means, but he is far superior to most of us. The way he has borne up against public scorn, slander and indifference is little less than heroic. This man, if he had been treated rightly, was destined by nature to be the leader of us all. His talents, his education, his force of character would have made him Governor of the State or our representative in Congress. As it is, his whole life has been wasted. You see how easily we made up to ourselves. It needed no blare of trumpets to crumble the walls of this Jericho. Paladine has invited me to The Quarries. I am going to go there. In return I will bring him out into the world, introduce him to the Marigny Rooms and try to indemnify him for the past, as much as possible. We are not old yet. We can enjoy many a happy day together."

In reference to the same circumstance, M. Paladine said:

"I see that Pascal is always a wag. The soul of fun is still alive in him. That man has done me more harm by his wicked tongue than any of my enemies. But I believe he never meant what he said. However, it is all over now. I should not have gone forward to meet him, but as we did meet, I am glad we have done so in a spirit of reconciliation. For that I have to thank you, Carey."

## V.

## TWO SHADOWS OF THE NIGHT.

My business took me to most of the foundations of the city. I spent a great deal of time in them. The play of intricate machinery had a singular attraction for me, and I was never satisfied until by my own reflection or by the explanation of the foreman, I discovered all its component parts and traced the secret of their harmonious combination. In this way I acquired a vast deal of practical knowledge.

One night I was returning from the rolling mills, situated on the river bank about midway between the city and The Quarries. It was not my first visit by a score, and frequently after doing my errand there I would continue my route to call on Ory and M. Paladine. But it was late to-night and I decided on walking back to the city. For some unaccountable reason, the hour and the place impressed me as they had never done before. The ground about me was covered with shags and clunkers, and there was no habitation within call. The only light came from the mills. Their furnaces glowed like centers, and the workmen, stripped to the waist, who fed its flames, had a wild, ferocious appearance. From the tall chimneys immense volumes of smoke, mixed with streams of fire, poured over the face of the river, illuminating it with a lurid reflection. Naught could be heard but the hiss of the escape-pipes and the low rumbling of the ponderous cylinders, which shook the earth at my feet. I had stopped unconsciously to contemplate this sublime scene, when I was aroused by the sound of footsteps near me. On looking around, my eyes still dazzled by the fire of the giant forges, I could discover nothing; but, peering more sharply into the darkness, I thought I spied two dark figures moving rapidly on the edge of the open space, about two hundred yards from where I stood. They were going southward, in the direction of The Quarries. I fancied at first that they were workmen returning to the mills, but the course they were taking soon made me change my mind. Without explaining to myself why I did it, I determined on intercepting them, and for that purpose walked straight across the flat. This was done so rapidly that I came in front of them before they could avoid me. I then distinguished them more particularly. They were a man and a woman. The man wore a wide-brimmed soft hat and a long overcoat which reached to his ankles. The woman was enveloped in a close-fitting cloak with a hood drawn almost over her eyes. I must not omit to mention that the night was very cold. When they saw me