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MY CREOLES:

A MEMOIR OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY.

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Book III.

TWO BLACKS DO NOT MAKE ONE WHITE.

XIV.

MIMI NURSES ME.

I did not rise the next morning. I was far too ill. My left shoulder and arm were swollen and a high fever consumed me. My mother, who, of course, knew of my return by my hat on the hall rack and the key in my chamber door, had not thought of calling me till late in the forenoon, under the impression that I needed a protracted repose. Neither had I thought of summoning her, lest I should startle her by the announcement of my indisposition. But when at length she did rap at my door, I was glad to give her admittance, for my sufferings were on the increase.

Her quick eye at once divined my condition. "You are sick, my son," she said: "why didn't you call me?"

"I am not well, indeed, mamma, though I hope it is not much."

And I told her in a few words what had happened to my shoulder the day before.

She became very pale and immediately rang for the servant, whom she sent with a message to the doctor to come without delay. In the interval she undid the bandages and was in the act of bathing the wound when the doctor entered the room.

"Halloo!" exclaimed the old family physician, the famous Dr. J.—"What is this? A knife or dagger cut? What row have you been in, Carey, my boy?"

How much good a doctor's off-hand chaffing can do! When you think yourself dead and he bustles about you with a jest and a laugh, you forthwith come to life again. It was the case with me here. I had not liked the swelling of the arm and shoulder at all. The suspicion of poison had flashed upon me, and, of course, I knew that if the negro's blade was poisoned, the virus was in the channels of my blood by this time.

I answered the doctor, with a ghastly smile, that I had indeed been in a row, and I gave him as much of the story of the wound as he needed to know.

"Nothing much the matter with the cut itself," said the doctor. "It is hardly more than flesh deep. But it is the whole system that has gone wrong. Clock run down, my boy. Blood thin, but hot. Too much study, may be—or too much cerebral excitement of some kind or other, followed by bodily exhaustion. Love, perhaps, eh, Carey?" added the dear old fellow, with a wink, as he sidled off to the window to spit out a piece of tobacco.

I suppose I could not blush, for the fever was too strong on me, but I certainly felt hotter than before. I smiled, too, being pleased with the thought that as the doctor could hit so well at the cause of the malady, he would be able to meet the malady itself as easily. Then the physician, forgetting all about me, sat down and had a long talk on poetry, philosophy, politics, as was his wont. It was only when on the point of departing that he left a simple prescription for the dressing of my wound and internal treatment.

"You'll be laid up for about two or three weeks, Carey, but don't fret any. I'll come to see you every day, and when the fever goes down a bit there'll be no objection to your receiving your friends. For to-day and to-morrow you had better keep dark a little."

The fever did not abate so soon as the doctor had expected. For nine days—why do these fevers always go in novenas—it went on gradually increasing in violence.

In the forenoon of the third day my mother came into my room with a more than usually smiling countenance. Seeing that I was resting easier after a good long nap, the first words she said were:

"Do you know who is down stairs, Carey?"

I brightened directly and smiled in my turn. But being ashamed to betray myself too openly, I answered that I could not guess.

"Why, no other than Mimi Raymond, my dear."

My countenance fell just a little, as I replied:

"Mimi Raymond! Impossible. When did she return?"

"She returned night before last, it seems. Last night she heard of your sickness, and though hardly rested from her long voyage, has come to see you."

Reader, you have not forgotten Mimi Raymond. If you have, be sure that I had not. After her accident at the Little Fork, when I had the happiness of rescuing her out of a watery grave, she was a long time recovering from the nervous shock she had then experienced. In the course of that autumn, upon her removal from Valmont to the city, I visited her several times

and she frequently came up to the college to see me. I was then much concerned to find her failing in health. As the winter drew on, the physicians advised a change of scene and her family undertook a voyage to Europe for her sake. I was glad to see her go, being persuaded that travel would restore her to her usual strength and spirits. But for some reason or other, she did not fancy the trip. I remember that our last interview was marked on her part with ill-concealed reluctance and regret, and it was only after a reiterated promise from me that I would correspond with her, that she took heart to bid me good-bye. Her letters from Cincinnati, Pittsburg and New York were very despondent, but when she reached the other side, a decided change for the better took place. In all her correspondence, however, whether grave or gay, she always referred to myself with the greatest kindness, inquiring into my studies, advising me to take care of my health and describing the brilliant destiny that was reserved for me. She never failed, too, to allude to her obligation to me, protesting that her gratitude to her hero, as she loved to call me, would end only with her life. During the whole winter and spring I answered her letters faithfully, with the usual warmth and cordiality of my nature, and I was so fortunate as to please and interest her, for she declared, more than once, that of all the letters which she received from home, mine were the most welcome. Dating from the early summer, however, my correspondence had slackened. Indeed, for nearly three months I had written nothing in answer to two or three long letters from her. I can attribute this neglect to no loss of consideration for my beautiful cousin, but simply to that unaccountable laziness which seizes every one now and then in the matter of letter-writing, and partly, too, to my studies preparatory to the final examination, as well as to the exceptional circumstances in which I had found myself placed during these several weeks. I had had no intimation that Mimi was to return home so soon, but as she had returned, and was come purposely to see me, I was delighted, and requested my mamma to bring her up at once.

Why did my heart throb so when I heard her step on the stair? Why did my head turn so rapidly on the pillow when I heard the door open? She entered on tip-toe with that grave look and manner which we naturally assume on penetrating into a sick-room. But the altered expression only served to give a more religious character to her incomparable beauty.

She had developed into a splendid woman. Her voyage had not only restored the roses to her cheek and the lustre to her eye, but it had given strength to her limbs and a graceful amplitude to her form. And her wealth of chestnut hair—mamma had made her lay aside her bonnet and shawl down stairs—was simply, yet artistically combed and her forehead was pure, bright and serene.

"Mimi," said I, holding out my arms, "how glad I am to see you!"

Her tears fell fast as she received my warm embrace.

"And I, Carey," she replied at length, "how I have longed to see you again! I heard last night that you were ill and I couldn't rest till I came to visit you."

Her presence did me a world of good. The fever seemed to give me a respite and I had a momentary accession of strength. She sat with me for a couple of hours, during which we went over together many of the incidents of past days, while she regaled me with a few episodes of her travel. In the course of the afternoon she came up stairs again and again, and her gentle manner and conversation both recreated and comforted me. When at length she took her leave, it was with the announcement that she would return on the morrow to take her quarters in the house and become my nurse during the remainder of my sickness. Vainly did I remonstrate against her subjecting herself to such a captivity after so long and fatiguing a voyage. She claimed it as her right; she declared it was her duty. My mamma was alone; she needed help. I, too, would require company, some one to prepare my medicines, see to my meals, talk to me, read to me, fan me when I slept. I yielded at last to her affectionate importunity, and we parted for the night.

The afternoon was drawing to a close now; a film of shadow was gathering in the room. Silence, the stillness of the sick chamber, than which there is no other so impressive, floated around me. I lay there as the subdued golden light of the setting sun illumined the western windows. I gazed upon the arabesques of the ceiling and the figures of the papered wall, eternal in their sameness. I listened to the click of the clock and the kitchen-girl's song in the garden, and like a dead weight on my heart, I felt what it is to be all alone in the world. Finally, lulled by the hushed solitude of the house, I closed my eyes, experiencing that peculiar buzzing sensation which we have

when we lie outstretched with closed eyes in the daylight. And soon I drifted into the land of dreams. Back to the fields of Valmont, to the spring in the glen, to the lanes fragrant with flowers, to the ravines impurpled with berries. Back to the shadowy woodlands, to the trim garden of Aunt Aurore, to the green orchard redolent of apple blooms. And amid those scenes, like the "fair spirit" for which Byron pined, I saw one whose face was the same as that of the beauty who had just left my side. To her I seemed that I knelt in adoration of her charms, her I followed with fascinated eyes, and though she toyed with my passion, yet, before the shadowy curtains closed over the blessed vision, I saw that she smiled upon me as only lovers can smile, and that the lambent flame in her eye told of a soft endearment throbbing in her heart. Ah! yes; I had loved Mimi Raymond, and I had told her so. She had treated me then as a foolish boy, but later, when I had proved myself man enough to risk my life for hers, she had spoken words of encouragement which had sent me away very happy indeed. Yes, I had loved her. And was she not loveable? Was she not beautiful? Was she not good? Was she not accomplished? And, furthermore, was she not my cousin, and did not this kindred blood furnish another link to the attachment that should draw our hearts together?

I had a restless night. The fever returned with redoubled force, and the next morning the doctor found me in a state of great prostration. He recommended quiet, silence and the avoidance of all emotion.

"Let Mimi come by all means," said he gaily, "only you must tell her what I have directed, and I am certain she will guide herself accordingly. You are lucky, you young rascal, in having such a nurse. If instead of the old women who serve in hospitals and elsewhere, I could find such pretty girls to nurse my patients, I would be very easy about their recovery."

With that punctuality which is an unfeeling character of love's worship, Mimi made her appearance at ten. She was not fashionably arrayed as the day before; she had laid aside her visiting robes, but was dressed, instead, in a pink calico gown of simple pattern. A snowy little collar about her neck; a grey linen apron tied with ribbons around her waist completed her outfit. No need to add that her hair was perfectly arranged, so that if she had been called suddenly to step into a ball room she would not have been obliged to touch her head-dress.

She glided into the room noiselessly, accepted with a sweet smile the pressure of my hand and the welcome of my lips, inquired how I felt, took a turn about the room to arrange glasses, phials, spoons, powders and other objects intended for my use, and then took her seat in an arm-chair near my bedside.

I need not describe the routine of the days which passed thus. Up to the ninth day, I required a great deal of nursing and Mimi found her office no sinecure. But her kindness and solicitude increased with the occasions which demanded their exercise. She anticipated my slightest wish; had everything ready at hand for the precise moment when it was wanted. Fifty times in the day I asked to have my burning pillow turned or exchanged, and as often she bent over me to perform the service. How pleasant the touch of those fingers in my hair; how gentle that breath passing over my face!

On the tenth day the doctor declared that the fever was effectually checked.

"But you must not go yet, Mimi," he added, "your impatient young patient will have to remain here awhile yet till he is thoroughly recruited."

"Impatient, doctor?" said my mamma, laughing. "Why, I think Carey has been a model of patience all the time. Has he not, Mimi?"

Mimi bore willing testimony to my good qualities.

"Well, that is not such a wonder," rejoined the humorous physician. "So would I be patient under the circumstances."

And he looked at Mimi with a knowing smile.

When he was gone I said to Mimi: "He is always a wag, is the old doctor. But I wonder if he means what he says?"

"How so, Carey?"

"That I am down for two or three weeks more."

"I hope so," said Mimi, looking steadily at me.

"Why, Mimi?"

"Because then I will be able to nurse you still."

XV.

CLIP DE THEATRE.

The next day was Sunday. Mimi had gone to church. I was alone with my mother. I seized the opportunity to communicate to her a project which had occupied my mind for several days previous.

"Mamma," said I, "I presume Ory knows nothing of my illness."

"I am pretty certain of it, my son. They live so solitary at The Quarries."

"Don't you think she ought to be informed of it?"

"I never thought of it, my dear. I daresay, if you wish it, that it might be done."

"My sickness, you see, has partially grown out of my wound."

"Yes."

"And that being the case, Ory and her father might take it hard if I kept them in ignorance of it. They regard themselves as responsible for my health, and they were both particularly sensitive about it when my wound reopened the other day."

"Precisely so. And now I think of it, Ory might look upon it as a mark of want of confidence aimed directly at herself, if you passed through a long period of sickness without so much as apprising her of your state of health during all that time."

"Not for the world, mamma dear, would I cause the girl the shadow of pain. If I did not mention the matter before it was because I expected only a few days of illness, spite of the doctor's quizzing. But now that I am only too conscious that I have a long interval of convalescence before me, I really think that, with your permission, a message should be dispatched to The Quarries."

"Very well, Carey; I am quite willing. For my part, I shall be delighted to see Ory and even her father if he chose to come."

"Oh! I have no idea that M. Paladine will come. The work of explanation and of reconciliation has not progressed far enough yet. He is a singular old man, as you know—a marvellous compound of good and bad. But he will send Ory in hot haste, I am sure, and that will be quite enough for me."

My mother smiled and looked pleased.

"And, mamma, I have another object in view in summoning Ory hither."

"What is it, dear?"

"I want her to meet Mimi."

My mamma was somewhat taken by surprise, and set herself to reflecting.

"Will there be any objection, do you think? I would like the two to make acquaintance, as I hold they ought to be friends for my sake."

"I do not see any real objection," said my mamma, at length. "The Raymonds and the Paladines have been and are still, I believe, total strangers, but, then, the Paladines have been strangers with nearly everybody; and, anyhow, the estrangement has nothing to do with the difficulties of our family. Your father always thought well of M. Paladine, was once his intimate friend, and even after his marriage into our family, continued to live on terms of good fellowship with him. So that altogether, I see no objection to letting the girls meet under my roof. How they will take the meeting, and whether they will sympathize together, is another matter, which of course rests entirely with themselves."

"I'll answer for that," said I, laughing.

My mother laughed, too, but said nothing. I shrewdly suspected at the time that she had her doubts about something or other which to her mind was probably well defined, but which a masculine mind would be slow to seize.

"Will you write?" said she, rising to go down.

"I prefer you would write, mamma, if you please."

"With pleasure. I will send Sam at once with a note to Ory."

"Thank you—and, mamma?"

"Well?"

"Say nothing about it to Mimi."

"You are going to be theatrical, Carey. You want to mount a little scene, eh?"

"That is just possible. But I set one condition."

"Namely?"

"That you be present."

"Come, come," said she, going off. "I see I shall have to humor you to the last. Make haste and get well, Carey, or you will be hopelessly spoiled."

XVI.

THE MEETING OF MIMI AND ORY.

I was not mistaken. My message brought Ory to me at once. I heard the sound of wheels on the street; I noticed that they stopped at our door; the wire vibrated in the hall; the sound of voices came to me from the vestibule. My mamma was receiving Ory.

Mimi was seated at my side, reading her missal. Hawthorne has drawn the sketch of a female sewing—a queer picture which deserves to be detached and inserted in every collection of literary master-pieces. To me the spectacle of a handsome woman reading—not a novel, for that is suggestive of listlessness or untidiness—but her Bible or her prayers, is something more fascinating still. It elevates our thoughts by fixing them on her spiritual nature, manifested in this instance by an exercise of the intelligence joined to a lifting up of the heart. I gazed upon Mimi and never had I seen her so beautiful.

A low rap at the door. I trembled on my pillow. Mimi arose, half closed her book and answered in a low voice:

"Come in."

Mamma entered, leading Ory by the hand. She looked about her like a frightened bird. I, too, was flurried at her costume. I had always seen her in white; now she was dressed in deep black. My mother broke the awkwardness of the pause which ensued, by pointing to me and exclaiming in a cheerful voice:

"Here is our invalid. He don't look very ill, does he?"

"Yes, Ory, here I am. How kind of you to come so soon!" I added, holding out my hand.

She approached the bed and placed her hand in mine. Her fine eyes were dim with tears.

"Oh! but you do look ill, Carey. How much you must have suffered in the last ten