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**SOLITARY ISLAND**  
 A NOVEL.  
 BY REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH

CHAPTER XXXIX.—Continued.

"Always Florian," she interrupted reproachfully.  
 "In what a position you would be after his commands to you concerning my visits!"  
 "But he will not open the door, and if he would you would not be found here. The window, these curtains, your honor—what a number of happy circumstances I trust to!"  
 "Pshaw! what is the matter with me? I have never allowed myself to be led by a string so with any woman. And my hand holding the winning card! One word and Florian would look on you with horror. What is the matter with me that I do not utter it?"  
 "The matter with you, count," said she, looking at her watch to catch a faint apprehension, "is that you have stayed too long. Now take yourself off while the door is open to you, or you may have to go by the window."  
 "One word, one little word," said the count, half to himself, "and you are assured to me. I swear my belief that Florian would never wish to see your face again."  
 "If you will not go," she said, rising with a trembling voice, "I must leave you. You have always treated me with honor."  
 "And I am bound so to treat you always," he exclaimed, jumping at once to his feet. "You shall not be compromised on my account, even to satisfy my hate for your lover. My time will come, and this hand which I now embrace—will you permit me—" He kissed her hand, while she stood laughing at his foolish devotion; and this was the tableau which greeted the cold, steady gaze of Florian entering at that moment by the softly-opening door. There was an awkward pause. Barbara grew pale to the last degree of pallor, and the count felt a thrill of delight leap along his veins. The great man alone was equal to the occasion, for he strode into the room as if nothing had happened, and made his politest bow to the two guilty ones. The count took his hat and retired towards the door until Florian detained him.  
 "You may leave here with a wrong impression of my relations to Mrs. Merrion," he said as blandly as was possible, "which I wish to correct. I once presented her to you as my promised wife. It was a pleasantry which now merits explanation. The lady herself will assure you that henceforth she is less to me than to you or any other man."  
 The count bowed with a sardonic smile, but Barbara rushed to Florian and threw both her arms about him amid a storm of sobs. In vain he endeavored to loosen her hold.  
 "He threatened you, Florian!" she cried. "He said you were in his power. I did it for your sake. Oh, do not be cruel do not be hasty. A little time, my love—time, time!"  
 Florian was staggered out of his stoical calm by this plausible explanation, and looked at the count inquiringly.  
 "It is true," said the latter proudly, "and if you will come with me I can show you the truth of what madame is pleased to assert of me."  
 "I will go," said Florian, in a voice which made her heart quake.  
 "Remember, sir, that the truth will bring a heavy penalty on your head."  
 "You must not go to-night, Florian," she sobbed—"oh! not to-night my dearest. Wait until you are reflected. Appearances are against you and me, and this man is your sworn enemy."  
 He flung her off almost rudely.  
 "You are under suspicion also," he said in that same awful voice, the voice of suppressed rage or fear. "Be silent until I come again. Not a word!"  
 She fell back among her cushions as the door closed on the two men and their footsteps died gradually away. But in an instant the sharp sense of danger revived her fainting senses, and with all her strength she began to cast about for means to prevent a catastrophe. They were going to the count's residence, probably, and some one must follow them and interfere in Florian's behalf. Paul Rossiter! He was at Madame De Ponsobny's, without doubt, and thought hateful to Florian, the very man, her instinct told her, to save her lover. Quick with cloak and out with the carriage, and fly, horses, at your best speed to the street where the poet lives!

The servant, opening the door to a hasty and violent ring, is struck with terror at sight of the wild figure which silently rushes past her and up the broad stair; and Frances, tranquilly passing across the hall, comes face to face with the one woman in the world whom she has most cause to dislike.  
 "Mr. Rossiter!" gasps Barbara.  
 "Quick—oh! quick, where is he?"  
 "Mr. Rossiter is not in," Frances replied, trembling like a leaf.  
 "I must find him," wringing her hands; "it is a matter of life and death. It concerns Mr. Wallace."  
 The pale face becomes paler, still, and a question forms itself on her lips, but her pride will not permit her to utter it. She writes the address of Mr. Peter Carter on a card and hands it to her.  
 "If you do not find him there return here and perhaps I can help you."  
 Barbara is half way down the stairs before the last word is uttered, and in a moment the carriage is flying round to the next street at full speed, but not as fast as her mind travels to terrible consequences. Paul, seated on the bed in Mr. Carter's warm room, hears the light step on the stairs in wonder, but relights Peter's pipe and reclines lazily to enjoy the philosopher's small-talk and gaze at him through half-closed eyes. Peter is in what he calls undress uniform, his shirt-sleeves rolled up, while his face glistens in the firelight and his hair stands up like an inverted broom.  
 "It is just the time my lady admirers call on me," Peter said, placidly drawing long puffs from the pipe; "and, strangely enough, they are not disenchanted by this dis-  
 "You do not look much worse than usual," says fun-loving Paul. And at that moment the steps outside are close to the door; there is a knock, and close upon it enters Barbara, in her excitement more lovely to bewildered Peter than she has ever been. Both men jump to their feet, and Peter makes a desperate dash for his best coat.  
 "It is of Florian!" Barbara cries out, exhausted. "He is going to fight a duel with Count Behrenski. You can stop it. You can save him, Mr. Rossiter. There is no time to be lost. There is the count's address," pushing a card into his hand, "and no time to lose. For Florian's sake!"  
 Then she sinks down in utter helplessness and begins to sob weakly, while the two men stand, in their first astonishment, looking blankly at the unexpected vision.  
 It was the first moment of pause since the scene between the count and Florian. Peter slowly grasped the meaning of her words, and, disgusted, laid down his coat, thought of Frances, and took it up again; finally put it on with a vicious jerk, and glowered with determined indifference at the weeping beauty. The poet grasped the situation almost before Barbara spoke, and he stood looking down at her without much pity, and with a half-formed resolution not to interfere. Better thoughts, and the recollection of Frances, and of the hermit, too, dismissed that unformed hard-heartedness. He poured out a few drops of brandy into a glass and gave it to her.  
 "Before I can do anything," said he gently, "I must know in detail what has happened and what is expected of me."  
 Barbara told her story without a break.  
 "I do not know what power the count may have over him," Barbara whimpered, "but I fear it's something dreadfully real."  
 "The power of a greater devil over a lesser," Peter said sourly. But neither noticed the words, and Paul went on to say that he thought he could understand it, and that perhaps a duel would be less fatal than the interview which the count proposed.  
 "I shall take your carriage," said he, "and go after them, doing what I can."  
 Paul had not a great sorrow for the mess into which Florian had got himself, but for Frances' sake, and for the sake of the dead prince, and partly out of pity for Florian himself, he felt anxious to prevent the revelations which the count might possibly make. He had a very strong suspicion as to what they might be; nothing certain, but even the possibility was dire enough to be avoided.  
 "It would make him a saint, or



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circumstances arising from your manner of life for years past you would have changed it. I would not, I fear. You might not, for your ambition has always been strong enough to blind you to truth and right. Pardon me for moralizing, but I wish you to understand me fully. You are a man I have never trusted since I knew you, and never could trust. Had you not dropped your faith—Florian started as if struck—"to become a politician it would have been different. With a man who has once been a firm Catholic it is dangerous to deal. You went looking for your father; so did we. You were afraid to find him; we were also, or at least I was, for I foresaw his taking-off. You were afraid his appearance would lose to you the title-sale money. The motives of each of us compare to the son's disadvantage, do they not?"

It was of little use for Vladimir to fix his mocking eyes on the averted face. The great man, face to face with the spectre which had so long stood at his side, had only its horrid features in his gaze.  
 "Well, you begin to comprehend, my Florian; you begin to recognize your own soul in this mirror of mine. You were false to a son's instincts because of your ambition; you were false to a lover's instincts because of your unprincipled passion. What folly it was to expect that you would be faithful to a friend when he stood in your way. You fooled us all very cunningly—alas! only in the end to shame yourself. You left your princely father exposed to the bullet of the assassin when a little honesty and patience would have saved him. How could you suppose I, the libertine, the unprincipled one, would have borne your insults in quiet? We continued to look for the father you deserted, and we found him. Your ambition left him exposed to our fury. But I was merciful. I had no taste for blood, for the blood of an unfortunate, a countryman, a co-religionist, my friend's father. I would have saved him but for you."  
 Again the great man started, and his face, hidden from the count, was twisted shapeless from that inward agony. The Russian's face had assumed a stern, malignant expression as he bent his fierce eyes on his foe and sometime friend. The last words he uttered as one would thrust the knife into a man's heart.  
 "I would have saved him but for you. You left the honored woman whom you had solemnly promised to marry, to deprive me of the one woman of my life—a woman far below your standard, hypocritical but charming; a woman to further your ambitions, but not to be the mother of Catholic children. As your desire for money exposed your father to danger, so your desire for this woman destroyed him. You remember that day which revealed to me your love for Barbara Merrion—a selfish, cruel love, doing no honor even to her. How you triumphed over me? You sent me home mad! I shall never forget that day on which I sealed my own damnation, if there be damnation, because of you! The spy had found your father! What shall I do with him?" he asked; and I said, "Kill him!"  
 There was still no need to look at Florian, now plunged into the depths of shame and agony. He uttered no moan, even! Outside there was a roll of carriage wheels, and presently the servant was knocking at the door with Paul's card. The count read it, and upon second thought declined to see the gentleman, but the poet was already in the room making his apologies. One look at Florian convinced him that he had come too late.  
 "There is no need for me to say anything, count," he explained, "since I see you have done the mischief I wished to prevent."  
 The Russian smiled, although he too was pale from emotion—and triumph. He rejoiced in his success, in the humiliation of his rival, in the joy of once more possessing Barbara, even if it had been accomplished through a dreadful crime. Low as Florian was, he was yet a degree lower. He whispered his last accusing words in the great man's ear with something like a laugh.  
 "The bullet of Nicholas slew your father, and I permitted it; but you—" He broke off abruptly and turned to Paul, his hateful feelings almost bursting from his worn, evil face, his finger pointed at Florian.  
 "Behold the murderer of his father!" he cried.  
 Florian rose and his face came into the light. A dumb animal would have pitied its woe, and the poet gave a cry of anger and sorrow which the politician did not hear. He bowed mechanically to the two and walked out gravely and steadily as a man proudly going to execution.  
 "If I were his friend, sir," the

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post said in his simple, truthful way, "or had the slightest claim upon him, I would feel happy in the right to punish you for what you have done."  
 "Mr. Rossiter," replied the Russian courteously, "I would be sorry if you had a claim. He deserves no pity. It will do him good, the knowledge which he has of himself. You will excuse me."  
 He offered his hand, which the poet did not take, and the look which he cast at that shapely member, as if he saw its bloody stain, brought an instant's flush to the brazen cheek. Paul went out to his carriage, and as he entered it he heard the gay voice of Vladimir humming a joyous tune.

CHAPTER XL.  
 Small consolation Paul had for Barbara when he returned to Peter's attic. Every thought flew from her mind but one when he entered in a thoughtful yet satisfied mood.  
 "I think you can go home," he said, "and give yourself no uneasiness. There will be no duel, at least to-night. The gentlemen were excited but courteous, as far as I could discover. Florian went off and I saw no more of him." Her countenance fell.  
 "Is it all so very well?" she asked dolefully. "Your words are doubtful."  
 "They should not be," he replied, "for the affair between them passed off in rather dull style. I can assure you there will be no duel. If you see Mr. Wallace to-morrow no doubt he can explain everything to your satisfaction."  
 "I must be satisfied," shaking her head sadly, while the tears began to fall. "Oh! what a wretched woman I am, and to know that my folly has caused it all."  
 The two gentlemen were silent and perhaps unsympathetic. Her empire was gone in more than one quarter. She gave Paul her hand and asked to be led to her carriage. Peter held the lamp as they descended the stairs, standing in stolid dullness like a podgy Fate, while his butterfly passed out of the circle of light into the lower darkness—passed out of his life altogether, and out of the life of everyone with whom she had been connected in these pages, and that, too, without a single salute from the gallant Bohemian whom she had so often deceived.  
 "Fare thee well! and if forever, still forever, fare thee well," hummed Peter, in mingled sorrow and disdain. "Ye're the last woman I'll ever bother my old head over. The world is no longer Arcadia or Paradise. Eve is still the betrayer of Adam. Oh! the groans these beauties have drawn from my aching heart. It's not aching much now, though, considering. Is she gone, Paul, b'y! Has the fairy taken flight? I'm bowed down with grief entirely this evening."  
 "She's gone," said Paul thoughtfully as he took his old place on the bed, while Peter resumed his undress uniform.  
 "Gone! O mournful word! Gone out of my life for evermore, b'y. I did adore that woman in a Platonic way; her smiles alone were divinities, and her eyes—it would have been better for me had they squinted instead of being the loveliest jewels in a woman's head. Poor thing, if she had a heart, and I had met her before Maria charmed me with her dignified ways, who knows what might have happened. Who knows?"  
 Peter went off into a reverie while speculating on the might-have-been, and Paul, diverted from annoying thoughts by the picture which he presented, amused himself with sketching the poky garret and its odd central figure wrapped in a cloud of smoke.  
 "Who knows," mumbled Peter—"who knows? I was a handsome fellow once before my nose was flattened in an American duel—with fists d'ye see! But the fellow wore

copper knuckles, I could swear. Poor little treacherous Barbara! no more a Catholic than the man with a gizzard. Yet a sweet soul, if she wasn't so deceivin'. O Peter, old b'y!—no, not Peter, but Parker—ye are forever done with females now until ye meet the sympathetic heart ye have always looked for. God help ye, my fine old gentleman! it's hard lines have come to ye at last."  
 To this melancholy strain Peter mumbled himself asleep, and the poet, leaving him to struggle with a ponderous snore, stole quietly back to the attic on the opposite street. It was after midnight, and yet she was waiting for him with her heart in her eyes and every beat of it sounding Florian's name. She did not need to ask him for his information.  
 "I am troubled for his sake as well as yours," he said, and the kindly words brought a smile to her lips. "He has heard what I threatened to tell him, from no very gentle lips, and he looked when he left us as if his heart had been cruelly wrong. I do not know if the truth will make him ill or bring him to his senses. It is better that you should not know it yet. I shall watch him and keep guard over him for your sake and his father's until any possible danger is passed."  
 She thanked him gently and went to her own room. The poet climbed to his attic, sadly haunted by Florian's despairing face.  
 "That time truth struck home," said he to himself, "and pretty sharply. If it does not drive him to any extreme it may have a healthy effect on him. But his eyes looked bad."  
 He did not like to utter the thought which troubled him. Florian's mental balance was remarkable, but the events of a few months past were of a kind to shake the reason of strong souls.  
 Neither Florian nor Barbara were to be seen the next day, or the day after, nor the third day. The papers had a serious rumor then of a sudden departure for Europe of the accomplished Barbara and a well-known attaché of the Russian embassy, but Paul would not believe it until a perfumed note in Barbara's handwriting reached him. Every one seemed to make him their confidant.  
 Dear Mr. Rossiter:  
 Try to believe everything people say of me in the next two weeks. My word for it, it is all true. I was married to Count Behrenski this morning. He convinced me it was all over between me and Florian; and if it almost broke my heart to know that, it did not cloud my senses to my own advantages. I am a Russian, at all events. I wish you luck in your love-affair. Au revoir!  
 BARBARA, Countess Behrenski.  
 The news of Mrs. Merrion's departure in the role of countess, after exciting the usual wonder of the town, settled out of sight. It did not reflect on Florian, whose broken engagement to the widow was not known; and still it would have mattered little to him, under present circumstances, if that disgrace had been flung upon him. He was not to be found in his office nor in his boarding-house, but, with his usual careful foresight, he had left written instructions for his clerk, without hinting at any date of return. Paul grew more and more uneasy when a week had passed and there was no news of him. Frances, with her wistful eyes and a dread in her face which he alone understood, came to him daily for information. That he could not give it frightened both, and vainly the poet cudgelled his brains to discover some clue to Florian's motives for suddenly disappearing. Had he gone to the island? What could bring him there in the early days of March? If he were repentant—  
 (To be continued.)