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

CHAPTER XXXIV.—Continued.

He fell into a reverie, and they both stood silent, with the splash of the water mingling with their thoughts. The hermit was excited more than ordinary, and had permitted it to be seen; but, as if regretful for his mistake, the old reserve began to settle over him again. He picked up his paddle suddenly and entered the boat without a word.

"I shall see you again?" she said, knowing he could not be detained. "I s'pose—I dunno," he answered absently, and pushed off from the shore. With a sigh Ruth returned to the house, where Billy and the squire still wrangled over Barbara Merion and Peter's letter. Père Rougevin was now one of the disputants, and rapped squire and politician over the knuckles with indiscriminate zeal.

"His career from first to last," said the père, "reminds me—"  
 "Just so," the squire interrupted; "you are always reminded of a story by any ridiculous trifle that a man mentions. But you won't tell that story on this veranda nor in my presence if you lived for forty years."

The père laughed softly and called Ruth to his assistance. "I saw you talking with Scott a moment ago. How is he?"  
 "There is something strange about him," Ruth said. "He seemed worried or disturbed, and acted queerly for him."

"He's probably just learned the alphabet," said the squire. "Talk about women learning nothing from experience—I don't believe it. But that man, dull, placid, stupid as a pine-tree, hasn't learned anything in twenty years. If he's getting worked up now it must be because he's found out that he's alive or that Florian is running for governor, or some other new fact."

"Oh! he knew about Florian," said the père; "and, moreover, he foretells his utter defeat."  
 "Oh! he does, does he?" snorted the squire in leonine mockery. "Do you hear that, Billy? This muskrat of the islands, this wild squash, this unattached egg, stands up and tells me and all the men who know anything about politics in this State that the old ticket will go down because he knows it will."

"Papa," suggested Ruth, "Scott was a good friend of yours at a time when you needed one."  
 "And I've paid him back all I owed him, my girl, long ago. I let him live. I never said anything about his foolishness to strangers. I upheld him in his idea of living alone when he ought to have been married. But let him keep his place. I can't stand ignorance, and when he shows it before me I'm going to stamp it out every time."

"He has a right to his opinion," said the père, "and I rather think you wouldn't dare the wager a very large sum on yours."  
 "I'll put my best horse against your ancient cob," said the squire, "that Florian is governor of this State on the 5th of November. Come, now. You're pretty obstinate on your own side; let's see you stand up for it."

Père Rougevin laughed and said nothing. "I know what you are thinking," continued the squire. "You are ready to swear that these Methodists and their kind will scratch his name on the ticket. I don't believe it. Our people have religion enough, but they're not so mean as to do that. What do you say, Ruth? You've known both parties, for you belonged to 'em."  
 But Ruth shook her head dismally, and appealed to Billy.

"and make what you can out of him. He's away beyond you, père, now. My! but he's a smart lad."  
 "Too smart," murmured Billy, in spite of Pendleton's frown.  
 "Lemme see," said the squire, "this is the 27th and Wednesday is the 30th. Yes, exactly. Now, père, you come over Wednesday evening, and I'll see you through a little game of checkers or block until four o'clock in the morning, if you want to. I'm not going to sleep from now till after election."

Père Rougevin accepted and was going down the steps when an after-thought stopped him. The père always had an after-thought of this kind, and it was usually as important as Padgitt's postscript in Armadale.  
 "By the way, Pendleton," he said, "you have not seen or heard anything of that Russian lately—the fellow, you remember, who—"  
 "Oh! I remember him," said the squire, "and he'll remember me should I lay hands or eyes on him. What would he be doing in this town, I'd like to know?"

"It's hard to say," the père replied lightly as he started off; "but he has been seen as late as yesterday in this vicinity, and means mischief."  
 The squire swore a little at this information, but Père Rougevin was beyond hearing.

Wednesday night was boisterous and stormy and had a wintry odor when the three old gentlemen, under Ruth's superintendence, sat down in the cosy parlor to a game of dominoes. "The wind was howling in turret and tree," and there was a mighty roar from the waves on the beach, while the distant light-houses twinkled weakly through the thick darkness. But these evidences of an ugly night without made the scene within only the more delightful, and the party prepared to pass a merry evening.

"It would be just like some old grandmother to take ill," said the squire, "and call you away. There's one thing, though—no mortal man can cross the bay to-night, and you're safe from that direction. It puzzles me—and he looked at Père Rougevin's round, cheerful outline humorously—"to know what there is in you that sends people rushing after you, at all hours and under all circumstances, to doctor their sick souls. Can't a man die comfortably and quietly without you, and is it necessary that you must shout him into heaven, or pray him in, or what do you do, anyway?"

"Why, papa—" Ruth began appreciatively.  
 "Just so, girl. It's a fair question, an' he's goin' to answer it; and you needn't look daggers at me for asking it."  
 "He reminds me—" said the père, smiling.  
 "No I don't," the squire roared. "Keep clear of your anecdotes. You don't spin any more yarns on me. Why, Ruth, he has me posted all over the country at the tail-end of forty stories."

Père Rougevin was silent for a moment, fairly weighed down by the force of Pendleton's lungs, and before he could speak there was a knock at the outside door.  
 "There it is," said Billy, "the sick call."  
 The servant brought Père Rougevin a card with a few pencil-marks upon it. He jumped up without much ceremony after reading it, and ran out into the hall. They heard a few hurried remarks from him and the stranger, and immediately he returned, bringing his visitor with him. His face was quite pale, but no one save Ruth noticed it, for all eyes were turned on the new-comer. The latter bore a curious resemblance to Scott, the hermit. He was dressed in the hermit's manner, had much of his silent, stern reserve, and wore his light beard in the same fashion; but over his eyes the peaked cap threw such a shade as to leave his face a mystery. He stood quietly at the door and neither removed his hat nor took a chair.

"Pendleton," said the père in some excitement, "I have a bit of bad news for you. Scott has disappeared. This man lives near him, and says he has not been home since Friday. That Russian has been in the neighborhood, and foul play is feared."  
 Only Ruth saw the revelation that lay behind the père's words and manner, and she burst suddenly into a fit of uncontrollable sobbing. A thousand insignificant incidents of the past ten years rushed before her



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mind.  
 "Oh!" she cried, "I see it all now. It is terrible!"  
 Her father stared.  
 "If any harm has come to Scott," said he, "that's enough. We'll avenge him. But what's the use of being frightened? If a man stays from home three or four days there's no harm in it. So dry your tears."  
 "O papa! don't you see? Scott is Florian's father."  
 "Yes," said Père Rougevin with emotion, "he is the lost prince, and we fear this Russian has been hired to injure him, and may have done it."

The silence which transfixed the squire for half a minute was so deep that the ticking of the clock sounded like the strokes of a hammer. The roar of the storm beat up against the house. He sat there with his heavy face void of expression, his eyes turned on the priest in a vacant stare, while he tried to realize all that those astonishing words meant.  
 "Good God," were his first hushed words. Billy could say nothing, and Ruth was still sobbing. Père Rougevin and the stranger grew impatient for practical suggestions.

"I'm beat," said the squire; "but I've got my breath again. I suppose it's so, and I don't doubt but that if we had our eyes open we might have known it before. And now when he's most wanted he's gone, and that sneak is after him and means him harm. Well," said the squire ponderously, rising, "we'll look for 'em both, and deal with 'em according to law. Young man, what have you to say about it?"  
 "The islands ought to be searched," said the stranger, "and a watch set on the waters, so that if foul play has done away with him his body may be found."

"And word should be sent immediately to Florian," said Ruth.  
 "I don't know about that," Pendleton remarked. "To-morrow will be a busy day for him, and he can't do anything more than we can do."  
 "Not the slightest need of sending for him," Père Rougevin said hastily. "It will be time enough to notify him when we have found Scott or what has happened to him."  
 Ruth said no more on the matter, but when the squire had put on his great-coat she was in the hall ready to go with them and prepared to put into action some ideas of her own. They raised no objection to her company, and all rode up together to the village, where the squire began his search for a boat able to stand the fury of a southwest wind.

Ruth in the meantime had sent to Florian the following telegram: "Come at once, if you would save your father's life." By the time she reached the pier again Pendleton had engaged a tug for the search and the vessel was getting up steam. A crowd stood about, curious to know the reason of a water journey on so tempestuous a night; but the squire sailed away with his party in lofty silence, giving only a hint to his hungry neighbors that it was concerned with the coming election.

Once on the water he called a council in the small cabin.  
 "We're going this thing rather blind," said he, "and I would like to hear your opinions and get a little more reason and certainty into it. I suppose we can search all the small islands to-night by ourselves with lanterns; but if we don't find him we must get help to-morrow, if we mean to do the business thoroughly."  
 "There are certain places," said the stranger, "which Scott frequented, and it might be worth the trouble to examine them. I know them all. But it is more likely that he avoided them when pursued by the Russian. You must know that Scott expected his identity to be

discovered, and provided

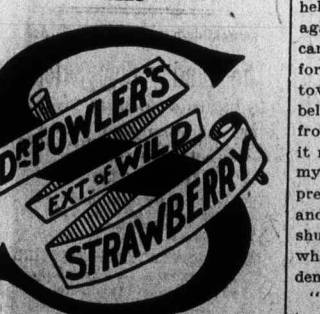
hiding-places among the islands. The principal of these was under his own house; but its secret the Russian discovered a few days ago, and he abandoned it. If he fancies that the others are known he will not go near them."

"Ah!" said the squire, "now you are giving us a fair start, young man. We must begin with his own house on the island first, then take the others in succession."  
 He went out to the pilot-house and the père followed him, leaving Ruth and the stranger alone in the cabin. The boat rocked and plunged uncomfortably in the heavy sea and the great waves dashed against the windows. Nothing was visible outside save the twinkling lights of the shore.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Rossiter," she said, "that I did not recognize you until you spoke this evening. I am very glad to meet you and to see that you are well."  
 "Thank you," said Paul, nervously, and was silent. Not a word was uttered concerning his long and mysterious absence from the world, and both were glad of it, for the greatness of the calamity which seemed to threaten them overshadowed minor things completely. A sudden quieting of the waves and the rushing of wind through the tree-tops signified that they had entered the tortuous channel leading into Eel Bay, and in a half-hour more they were sailing opposite the hermit's cabin. All went ashore save Ruth, who felt that she would be a hindrance in the search, and she remained leaning against the dock-rail, watching the movements of their lanterns as they walked over the small island. They returned to the boat unsuccessful, and steamed to another spot, which was searched with the same result; and so through the whole of the stormy night they continued their vain pursuit of the lost prince, returning to Clayburg for breakfast and additional help.

By this time a great portion of male Clayburg had begun to take a deep interest in the squire's mysterious proceedings. The crowd which had gathered the preceding evening on the wharf to see him depart recollected itself in the morning to see him return, and was swollen to a treble size by new recruits from the curious town. As they could get no information from the party, the pilot and the engineer were assailed by a shower of questions as numerous and irritating as mosquitoes; but here, too, curiosity was baffled, for these knew no more than that their employers had sought among the islands for somebody or something they did not know what and did not care. When the squire and his friends had breakfasted and made ready for another start by bringing loads of provisions to the boat and fitting it out for as long a stay as possible on the water, a mob of men and women were standing on the dock in the cold November morning fairly eaten by curiosity. From among them the squire made a selection of ten good fellows to aid him in the search. They went on board indifferent to the direct and indirect questions fired at them, and sailed away mysteriously, to the utter disgust of the crowd. Ruth did not accompany them. She had been overcome with weariness, she said, and did not feel equal to the fatigue of a twelve hours' journey—

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**SURPRISE SOAP**  
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which was strictly true, but her real reason for remaining was the telegram which Florian sent her that morning announcing his arrival in Clayburg for that evening. It was a dull, stolid day. The wind had died away, and the sun was buried in thick clouds before he had been two hours shining, and such a bitter suspicion of snow was in the cold, heavy air! At ten it began to rain, and the thick mists shut out the river and brought a deeper chill to the atmosphere. Time hung the heavier on her hands. She could not read, and thought was distressing. A few old gossips came in to hear the news of the day and discover the cause of so much mysterious running about in the quiet town, and she replied in dark and secret language, with many hints of greater surprises yet in store for them, and sent them away satisfied and yet unsatisfied. In the stores and saloons and kitchens that day the squire's movements were thoroughly canvassed. A mystery so important as to require a tug and fifteen men to carry it out was a delightful morsel in dull November, and the peaceful citizens enjoyed it; but when the telegraph messenger passed the word that a special train was due in Clayburg at four o'clock that afternoon, nearly three hours ahead of the regular train, the excitement spread to the highest grades of town society, and even the ministers trotted down to the depot under the same umbrella to examine this second wonder of the day. But Florian knew his native village well. Half a mile from the depot Ruth met him with the carriage, and the train moved into the station without a soul save the employees on board. So with every disappointment the mystery grew.

A more wretched man than Florian Ruth had never seen. His proud bearing was gone, his proud self-possession had melted from him like snow, and his pale, drawn face and listless manner showed what he had suffered since receiving her telegram and what he was suffering. He took her hand gratefully as he entered the carriage. She tried to speak, but her own sobb were too powerful.

"You need not tell me," he said. "We are too late. I know that, and I might have saved him; I might have known long ago."  
 He repeated the last words over and over like one in delirium. When she had grown calmer she told him all the circumstances of the last few days, beginning with her last talk with the hermit, and he sat with his head bowed, listening, nor made any comment for a time.

"Where were our eyes," she said, crying, "that we did not see through this loving imposture long since? A spy could discover him, and we could not."  
 "The spy had exceptional resources," he answered; "and yet it would have been so easy to have reasoned. You remember the interest he took in me, and I recall the dreams I had of him kissing me, poor father! in my sleep; and how in the graveyard here one night he held me in his arms with his cheek against my own; and the time he came to New York, risking so much for love of me. Then his behavior towards Linda on her death bed. I believe she knew it, for she looked from him to me so strangely—I see it now; I could not see it then. And my mother's behavior when he was present or spoken of. What a life!" and he added after a pause, with a shudder of horror and grief, "and what a death, after so much self-denial and love!"

"Oh, be patient!" said she, attempting cheerfulness. "They are searching for him bravely, and he is so cunning and active that it will take an expert woodsman to overmatch him."  
 "His pursuer," said Florian gloomily, "is by profession an assassin. He has but one instinct, that of death, and he will follow, follow, follow like a hound, never wearying, never stopping, cunning as a devil, pitiless as hell, until his victim is dead. I can see him now crawling through some lonely patch of timber in the rain with that white face of his shining in the gloom."

She had to admit that the picture was not overdrawn, and they came to the house in silence.

"I will not go in," he said; "I must get a boat and join in the search. I am going mad, I think."  
 "But there is no wind, Florian, and you can get no tug, for there is none here. Better wait until the rain stops; there will be a wind then strong enough to make the boat of use."

He held up his hand in the air. "There is wind enough," said he, "I could not stay; I must go."  
 She went into the house and brought out some oil-cloths for him to put on as a protection against the rain. With a servant to manage the boat they started, taking a course straight down the river in order to meet the tug; but the wind soon died away almost entirely when they were opposite the well-known channel leading into Eel Bay, and Ruth proposed, seeing how impatient he grew, that they would go to the hermit's cabin and wait there for a favorable wind. It was done, and for the first time in years he entered his father's house.

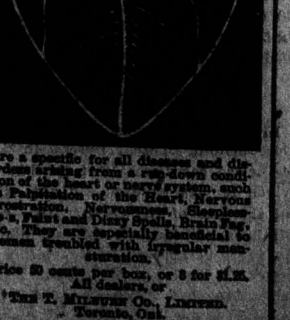
"What a palace for a prince!" he said, and a great bitterness filled his heart as memory after memory connected with the old cabin rose before him.  
 Darkness came on, and the servant lighted the old candle and the fire was started in the fire-place. He sat reading Isaac Walton or wandering uneasily to the shore, while Ruth, wearied, lay down to sleep in the inner room. The night passed in a dead calm. At four o'clock in the morning the clouds parted in the northwest and the first suspicion of a wind stirred the water. He waked her, saying gently: "We must be going."

It was cold, and unpleasant in the damp morning air, but a few stars shone faintly overhead. As before, they went straight down the river, taking the wider channels in order to intercept the tug if she should be returning. At daylight they reached Alexandria Bay, and in the distance later on, as the sun was rising, they saw the tug steaming further down the river.

"They have not found any trace of him yet," said Ruth. "They are searching still, or they would be returning."  
 "Why do they take the islands below instead of those above?" he asked.

"I believe they have a guide, on board who lived for some time with your father," she replied, "and he thinks he must have fled in that direction. When I last saw him he was going down the river."  
 They sailed on, the wind still cold and feeble as before, and in two hours they had reached the island. Florian would not go near the tug or make himself known to any one, but went ashore in his oil cloths and silently joined in the search, while Ruth sailed to the tug for information. No success yet and no clue! When she returned Florian was waiting for her on the shore.

"They will never make anything of this," he said. "It is too wild and they have to cover too much ground. Let us go back and search the islands above."  
 (To be continued.)



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