



SOLITARY ISLAND.

A STORY OF THE ST. LAWRENCE.

By John Talbot Smith, author of "Brother John the Mayor," "Saracac," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.—CONTINUED.

The poet made his morning meal in silence and constraint. It reminded him of many meals he had eaten in the same room while sharing the hermit's hospitality. The circumstances were little changed. Although the day was cold, the sun shone through the red-curtained window with a summer brightness, the log fire glowed in the hearth, the savory smell of broiled fish pervaded the little room, and Florian, a wonderful likeness of his father, sat eating sparingly, silent but not gloomy, save for the sad shadow of occasionally fitting over his face.

"You may be aware of the circumstances which led to my stay on Solitary Island," said he to a beginning. "I had been feeling in his looks. Paul thought it prudent; but it was real. The great man had no feeling towards him."

"I am not aware of them," he replied. "Strangely enough, our resemblance to each other," said Paul. "The spy, who pursued you because of your resemblance to your own family, pursued me for the same reason, drove me out of all employment, and with the aid of an occasional friend, brought me to the verge of poverty and death. Your father saved me, and for reasons quite plain to us both, took me in and earned my everlasting gratitude for himself and his son."

"A faint flush spread over Florian's face in the pause that followed," he said humbly. "For my guilty share in your sufferings. I was your friend, and I should have aided you; but I was led to believe you stood between me and Ruth, and again between me and Frances Lynch. I was glad you suffered. I regret it sincerely now. I trust you will forgive me."

"It was the poet's turn to blush at this humility." "Do not mention it," said he. "Peter Carter was the cause of all these troubles. You are not to blame. I am not sorry for them. They brought me in contact with your father."

"And I hated you for that," Florian went on in the same tone, "because your worthiness won a privilege which my crimes deprived me of. I spoke to you once under that impression in a manner most insulting. I asked—"

"He held a trap-door in the floor of the bedroom, and he held a candle, holding a lighted candle, into the cellar."

"It is not a cellar," he explained, flashing the light on the rocky walls, "but a cave. Here is a door concealed in the rock very nicely. We open it so. Now enter and hear me speak."

"They could hear the sound of running water in the cave, but Florian paid it no attention. His eyes were fastened on the new discovery. A set of rods selves took up one whole room, and an almost square room, and was thickly crowded with books. The general character was devotional and mystical, but the classics were well represented, and astronomy and philosophy had the choicest volumes. A rough desk held a few of his manuscripts, and writing materials. From a peg in its side hung a leather discipline, whose thongs were tipped with fine iron points. A few sacred prints hung on the walls. Florian kissed first the crucifix and then the discipline."

"This spot," said Paul reverently, "is a secret to all save you and me. When I first came here, I was down and discouraged—it seems a beautiful and fit sanctuary for the disheartened—I was sincerely disposed to learn more heavily on God for the support I needed. After a little the prince took me into his confidence, and I beheld such a sight—the tears of emotion poured from his eyes—"

"as I had never dreamed of seeing this side of heaven. Long meditations and prayers, mortifications such as that discipline hints at, unbounded charity for all men, are virtues common to all the saints. They did not impress me as did the glimpses of his soul which I received. Ah! seemed an overpowering love of God. It seemed to burn within him like a real flame and to illuminate the space about him as does this candle. I would have feared him but for the love and strength these very qualities gave me. I knelt here with him often, and when I was strong enough tried to stay by him in his hour of prayer. I saw wonders here and dreamed real dreams. And no one knew it save myself. Who would have believed it had not been seen what I saw?"

"Blind, blind, blind," murmured Florian, "but my love was not as sharp as his, and my soul too low to look for such a manifestation of grace. My sin is all the greater."

"The last time I saw him," continued Paul, "was in this spot, kneeling where you are kneeling. He had a premonition of his coming passion, but it was lightened by the conviction—perhaps it was lightened by him—that out of it would come the salvation of his son."

"Behold the murderer of his father," Florian murmured to himself. "Tell him also not to despair, but with a good heart, and without haste or great grief for anything save for his sins, to be content with the grace which is always yours by penance. You see he knew; and when I asked him if he were about to die, 'God holds all our days,' said he, 'who knows but this may be our last? I never saw him again in life. God rest his soul, if it has not been saved by his penance.'"

"There was again a short pause as Paul waited to review that last scene and to recall the tones, the feelings, the incidents of a most pathetic moment. Florian still knelt at the desk with his fingers about the discipline."

"Well it is all over," he said to the kneeling figure; "let us go. You notice the dry air of the cave. It is beautifully ventilated and very safe for such a place. Your father loved it. Come, my friend. Or do you wish to review that scene?"

"I have finished my work—almost," said the poet, putting on his hat, "and now I am going. Can I be of any help to you?"

"My father's friend and mine," Florian replied, "I have need only for your pardon and the renewal of that affection you once had for me."

"And before long, Florian. You have it still, and the pardon which is always yours by penance. After a little you will return to New York?"

"Yes, after a little," he replied slowly, "but not to remain. Here is my home in the future. I have my business to close up and my own affairs to perform. After that my solitude."

"It was on the poet's lips to dissuade him from so extravagant a course, but he thought better of it and said nothing, preferring to leave so delicate and dangerous a matter to time and good Providence. He closed up and went to his room. He was far as the opposite shore, a smile of joy lighting up oddly the sad lines of his face. He seemed, however, singularly destitute of the power of self-reflection. He thought of the man who had been so much the object of his father's attention to himself. He was smiling, not for joy, but in obedience to some hidden impulse which he did not think of analyzing."

"Why to him?" "Do not look pleased?" he asked, with a puzzled expression which silenced the poet. They parted at the entrance to the woods.

"I still see you again," said the poet, clasping his hand. "That was a miserable day for Ruth Pendleton which witnessed the vulgar outbursts of Barbara Merriam and showed to her the real character of the woman in whose name she had been named. She went to her father's room and told him the whole story; and in her heart there was the dread of his reaching Paul's ears, as it must if he remained long in the town, or if Barbara encountered him. She was alone, at his sadly altered appearance, stooped, pale, hollow-eyed, and the firm lips quivering. But better that way and dearer to God than in the pride of his physical strength and political glory, he said, looking around the homely room."

"I healed my father's heart—"

"And it will heal yours," she added for him as he left the thought on his lips unexpressed. He smiled as if she had reproached him.

"I hope so. You have not known all my wickedness, Ruth. I deserted Frances—"

"I know it all, Florian. Do not distress yourself with recounting it. Your repentance will be all the sweeter for her, poor girl."

"How can I make it?" he said humbly. "I have put a shame upon her which only marriage can take away; yet I could not ask her after the wrong I have done."

"Do not think of it at all," said Ruth with emphasis. "Go to her, tell her your sorrow and your resolutions. Her love will find a way through difficulties. Linda would rejoice to see this hour," she added. "Florian, what a time it has been! What a treasure we missed finding! I cannot forgive myself for not knowing it."

"I came near missing it altogether," he said in turn. "I was but little disturbed at his discovery of my death. What a fate is mine! Had I remained in Clayburgh he would have made himself known to me. Had I even been faithful to God while in the world he would have granted me the favor. Had I then to discover him, and not to fear it, I would have found him. Had I been faithful to Frances he would not have died. My ambition, avarice, disloyalty to the faith, and desertion of my promised wife have been paid for by the fact that I am his murderer. I would I never had known my dreadful share in his death had I responded to the feelings which decency and grace prompted in me when I was last on the island after his death. But no; I went back to evil and thus was I turned from it. May God and my saintly father help me; but indeed, Ruth, I am a most miserable man!"

Knowing the double meaning in his words he watched her confused with secret delight. "The island has another secret."

She cast a startled look at him. "Florian has come back a penitent, thrown up the world and its honors, and proposes to live and die, as did his father, in the obscurity of that island."

"I am dazzled," she replied; "I cannot understand such things."

"They are as true as they seem, Miss Pendleton. This evening I shall explain them. Florian is on the island, has been there for ten days, and Mrs. Merriam has married a Russian count and gone to Europe. You are still more surprised. Let me say good-day to you, and do me the honor of being at home this evening."

Ruth was again deceived. This visit concerned only Florian, she thought, and consequently there was no reason why she should fear that Barbara had exposed her. That night when Rosette called talk drifted into the usual channels. Paul related the circumstances which had led to Florian's flight to the island, and gave Ruth a description of his experience with the penitent that morning.

"It is a wreck you have seen, not Florian," she said, with tears in her eyes; "but you have seen the man who has come back to us. Thank God! I hope Linda and the prince know this day of joy."

"It is quite impossible," said Paul, "that he should take up the life his father led. Yet it fits him wonderfully; and to see his own world think the prince was revived."

"We shall leave Pere Rogovin to settle his future. He will make it easy for him to resume the old life without violence to the grace which he has received. I shall make bold to visit him to-morrow."

"I shall have the honor of accompanying you," said Paul, "if you have no objections. I am going to the island myself. My two reasons for coming here, I wished to make certain of what had happened to Florian for the sake of Frances."

"Poor girl!" said Ruth, "she will be his salvation yet."

"Indeed she will, Miss Pendleton. I believe his heart turns that way still. No great heart like his could ever find content in such a creature as Mrs. Merriam. And my other reason was to remove any misunderstanding between you and me."

"Misunderstanding?" said Ruth, greatly surprised. "I have loved you a long time, Miss Pendleton—fully eight years. I have tried to keep it a secret, to bury it forever from your knowledge, and yet I could not. I could not leave you without having spoken. God knows if I might not have made a mistake in so doing! It would be an eternal regret to me, and so I wish to know from your own lips, Ruth, if I must part from you forever. It rests with you to give me the greatest happiness or the greatest sorrow of my life."

"I shall be compelled to give you—"

She hesitated, for her emotion was strong, and she dreaded an exhibition of tears. Paul trembled in spite of his confidence in Barbara's story.

"I shall be compelled to give you," said Ruth calmly, after a time, "what you call the greatest happiness of your life. And she laid her hand in his for an instant while their eyes met and exchanged the thoughts too true and sweet for expression. His face was radiant, and he made no demur when she begged to be excused and withdrew to her own room. God had been very good to her. She had triumphed in spite of her own fears. His will had honored and blessed her beyond belief. The Squire's heart fell when Paul made a formal demand upon him for his daughter.

"I had thought Ruth's idea of marrying was over," said the Squire sadly; "but, if you've made it up between you, I have only to say yes."

Florian easily guessed the relation existing between the two who visited him the next day. Ruth's manner was always as clearly marked in its modesty and reserve that her intimates might soon discover any variation in it. The new hermit accepted the position quietly and without so much as a single reflection on what might have been the result. Paul trembled in spite of his confidence in Barbara's story.

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turned from it. May God and my saintly father help me; but indeed, Ruth, I am a most miserable man!"

His cheeks flushed while he was speaking, and Ruth's tears fell slowly. It was his second outburst of feeling in mortal faces, the third being now visible through the half-open door, where Peter was listening, impatient and interested.

"I do not pretend to know your motives," she said calmly, "but your offer we reject for good reasons. It is quite impossible that my daughter should ever again consider marriage with you."

The face of Frances grew pale as death, but her lips were pressed tight in determination. Paul growled and Peter started forward, then drew back. Madame created these signs of rebellion by her proud and confident indifference.

"Perhaps it is best," Florian said after a pause. He had received her answer without any surprise, as if he considered it a very proper thing. There have been many changes in my life which might not be agreeable to you. In no way am I the same as when I first had the honor of proposing for your daughter's hand. I will never again be the same, I trust. I have not a moment to spare to take on a stain for a great injury. You have forgiven me. It would be a great pleasure to know that in your opinion I have done all that is possible."

His wistful gaze and simple words disconcerted Madame considerably. She was half-convinced that Florian was acting, but his motives were hidden, nor could she discover them. There was no adequate motive to explain this masquerade.

"You could not have done more," she answered steadily in a tone that closed the interview. Florian rose and bowed his farewell. A rumor crept through political circles in the metropolis that Florian was closing up his legal business on the point of retiring to a more congenial field of labor. It was only a rumor, and he it could be verified the great politician had utterly disappeared from the sight of men. A reporter was knocking his door out of shape for an interview at the very moment which saw him approaching Clayburgh on the evening train. Thus the world could always knock at the doors of his heart. Never again would they open to any of its emissaries, and his joy had something fierce in it as he reflected that, as he would be entering Clayburgh from the north, for the last time. Behind him in the distance his burnt ships were smouldering—his fame, his power, his wealth, his memory, his love! Men would never more see the eyes fixed on Linda's rough seas towards glorious harbors. If they heard of him—and he prayed they would not—it would only be to hear of his conquests over himself; and probably they would wink, and smile, and touch their foreheads knowingly to insinuate his mental weakness. A fact which pleased him greatly and drew a smile from him, as showing how often the world mistook wisdom for folly.

He jumped from the train before it reached the depot, and made his way across the fields to the river. It was the first week of May and the ice was gone, but the chilly air blew sharply across the water, and the shore resounded under the breakers. He stood on the hill for a moment with his eyes fixed on Linda's rest-place, where the tall monument pierced the sky. His resolution had been to look no more to the past, to leave his sad reflections in the grave, and to keep his eyes on the future, while his thoughts engaged in the work of his hands. What they could not do, at this moment it was impossible. Back went his recollection to the hour when Linda was in the meridian of her health and beauty, when he was young and full of hope and sustained by the new hermit. As a part of love's clear title. The intervening years were like a nightmare—ignorance at the beginning, murder at the end, and mystery everywhere. Was he not dreaming now? At a convenient spot along the shore he found a boat, which he knelt not, but used it as if it were his own. It was a long and weary pull against a north wind until he reached the shelter of the channel; and longer and wearier across El Bay to the anchorage below the cabin; and then he found himself on the shore, entering a room, and he heard the first set foot on this island. First to the grave and then to the house! He lit the fire and drew the curtain, foiled Isaac Walton, and settling close to the log fire, felt himself at home. "Home!" He was cut off from the world at last and forever.

Ruth quickly received word of his return and the events preceding it, and had a long conversation with Pere Rogovin touching the new hermit. As a part of a plan which she had conceived, and the Pere approved and perfected, the Squire was informed of Florian's presence in Clayburgh.

"What is he stopping?" said the old man, doubtfully. "What has he been doing at this time of the year? What's he come for?"

"He is living by himself on Solitary Island," said Ruth. "For the rest you had better ask himself."

"What?" said the Squire, and he said a queer word under his breath, "have you Jesuits got hold of him again?"

"The news came from New York," Ruth replied indifferently; "I know nothing more about it."

TO BE CONTINUED.

unworthiness. I beg of you not to misunderstand my motives."

Madame never hesitated in her reply, although while Florian was speaking she caught the petitions of three appealing faces, the third being now visible through the half-open door, where Peter was listening, impatient and interested.

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TO BE CONTINUED.

EARLY ACCIDENTS

Cause Lifelong Suffering. A Case that is Causing Talk.

When a lad about eight years of age I fell into a cellar a distance of ten feet, striking on my head, and causing considerable damage to the brain. I was taken to a London, Eng., Hospital, the first seven days not recovering consciousness. I am now 35 years old and from the time of my accident until I began taking Dr. Ward's Pills five months ago I had been subject to fainting spells, never being more than two weeks without an attack of fainting. As I grew older these spells became more frequent, lasted longer, and caused more nervous debility. I was weak, had no strength or stamina, always very low-spirited and down-hearted; imagined that every thing and every person was going against me, and life only had a dark side for me. My appetite was poor most of the time, but I am now happy to say that, since taking Dr. Ward's Blood and Nerve Pills, I have only had one fainting spell, shortly after I began taking them, so I have no hesitation in saying that Dr. Ward's Pills cured me. Before taking these pills I always looked for a fainting spell not more than two weeks apart; now, I would be glad to surprise any doctor who expected to see me fainting, but I am now happy to say that, since taking Dr. Ward's Blood and Nerve Pills, I have only had one fainting spell, shortly after I began taking them, so I have no hesitation in saying that Dr. Ward's Pills cured me. Before taking these pills I always looked for a fainting spell not more than two weeks apart; now, I would be glad to surprise any doctor who expected to see me fainting, but I am now happy to say that, since taking Dr. Ward's Blood and Nerve Pills, I have only had one fainting spell, shortly after I began taking them, so I have no hesitation in saying that Dr. Ward's Pills cured me. 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