

SOLITARY ISLAND

A NOVEL.

BY REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH.

CHAPTER XXVI.—Continued.

"We have a very fine one, or rather three of four, to be produced on alternate nights for the rest of the season."

"Which means, then, that you have no further need of my services."

"Precisely," said Manager Aubrey smilingly.

"Confound you!" thought Paul, as he left the office with his play under his arm to seek another manager. "This is not likely to be the end of the trouble. All these theatres will be affected by this change. What a fool I was not to have seen it coming!"

He conjectured very fairly as to the condition of the dramatic market. The change was universal, and his play was not in demand. Disgusted, he sold it to a Bowery manager for a trifle, and vowed that he would never write a drama again; but he returned home sick at heart and with a melancholy conviction that the managers had conspired against him. His one profitable source of revenue was effectually cut off, and he knew it would be a task to find such another. Still, there was no need of starving, as had been the case with him formerly. The newspapers were available, and Peter would stand his friend in case of need. And Peter did so to an extraordinary degree, finding some hack-work that brought in an occasional dollar, and giving the theatres such a lashing of criticism on the new style of plays as cost them heavily to counteract. Peter interviewed them separately in his vigorous cut-and-dash manner, doing Paul more harm than good, but annoying managers considerably. With these services he ceased to benefit Paul, and the poet, after some years of moderate prosperity, descended again into the depths from which a fortunate chance had raised him. But for one circumstance no one would have had reason to suspect the change of fortune. A number of poor families in the city were his clients. He had assisted them generously in many ways to eke out a living. Some enterprising boys he had helped in getting an education; perpetual invalids were dependent on his kindness for little necessities; large families looked to him to help keep their members decently clad and fed. They were not many, of course, but more than one individual with a moderate income is supposed to patronize. All these must share in his misfortune. He had to tell them of the change, and was comforted by the tears and sympathy of the poor people, who thought more of his sufferings than of their own.

It worried him so much for their sake, and he worked so hard in so many ways and endured so much personal privation to make up to them what they had lost, that his physical powers soon began to lag under the strain. He grew pale, worn and nervous, was seized with fits of despondency. He was not more than two weeks in his new position when for some trivial reason he was discharged. Peter stormed, of course, and got him another, which was as speedily lost in the same manner. Then Paul remained quietly within doors and looked no more for places. Some malignant devil seemed to be pursuing him, and his fancy threw about the face of Nicholas a tragic glow which added much to his nervousness. Peter's anxiety and mutterings drew Madame's attention to the matter. She took a kindly interest in the lonely poet, and was happy to be of service to him.

Madame called on Paul to assure him of her sympathy and to promise him that she would use her influence in getting him a position; and Frances came up often with Peter and was very witty and quarrelsome for the purpose of raising his spirits. From these kindly visits Peter evolved a bright syllogism whose conclusion struck him with the force of a tornado. Madame and her daughter were about to take advantage of Paul's weakness and arrange the long deferred marriage of the young people. Paul's noble sacrifices in behalf of the poor, his patient endurance of misfortune, his piety and beauty, had at length become irresistible in the influence over the girl's heart. Now was the time to strike a telling blow in favor of his pet project. He waited a few days until Madame had made herself conspicuous in Paul's interest, until Frances had ministered his soul into cheerfulness, and then Peter's diplomacy began to move about like the bull in the china-shop.

He hurried one day into Madame's presence, and burst out with:

"He's dying, that boy is dying, and we have only ourselves to blame for it."

"Do you mean Mr. Rossiter?" said Madame, terribly frightened.

"Don't get excited, ma'am. There's no immediate harm, done, but between you ye are killin' the boy."

"Oh!" said Madame, "one of your freaks, I suppose."

"A woman of your years and experience," said Peter, looking at her with uneasy glances, "ought to be better able to get at the bottom of things than ye are, instead of leaving such work to be done by your boarders. There's no use breaking your neck running over the city to find out the cause of Paul's illness, when it's here in the house, as large as a young lady can be."

Madame sat provokingly quiet, awaiting the point of his eloquence.

"Can't you see that he's in love with your daughter?" said Peter angrily.

"No," said Madame composedly; "is he?"

"Nothing less than marrying will cure him; and it's a shame to have her waiting for the good pleasure of the man without a heart, with a real live poet wasting away in a garret because of her. He'd write beautiful verses for her all her life, while from the Congressman devil a thing else she'll hear but dry speeches and the like."

"Did Mr. Rossiter tell you he was in love with Frances, and commissioned you to plead his cause for him?"

"Ay, that he did, ma'am; for no one ever stood his friend as well as Peter. When he was feeling bad over his own weakness who else would he choose? 'Never mind,' says I, 'I'll let out the cause of it; and he thanked me with two tears in his eyes. If there's a heart in ye at all ye'll see that he's rescued from the grave by giving him Frances. She's crazy after him, the poor girl.'"

"Have you spoken of this to others?" said Madame icily.

"No; I think not. I might have, but—"

"If you ever do," said Madame, "it will be your ruin. My interest in Mr. Rossiter ceases from this instant, and he must depart at once from this house. Such an insult to my daughter—such a poor, ungentlemanly return for all my kindness! It is shameful!"

Peter walked out stupid from humiliation. He could not see what there was in a proposal of marriage to raise the ire of any woman, and he could account for the ill-success of his diplomacy only by the strength of Madame's ambition to obtain a grand son-in-law. What was he to say to Paul, and how was he to say it?—for the poet must know of the matter at once. He had drawn heavily on his imagination in supposing that Paul had ever said a word about marrying Frances or any other girl. Although he racked his brains carefully, he could not discover a peg on which to hang a defence of his own conduct. When some hours had been spent in the vain attempt he stole silently from the house and was neither seen or heard in its precincts for a full week.

In the meantime the effects of his interference were direful. Madame and her daughter ceased to visit the attic, and Paul received the intimation that as soon as convenient Madame would let the attic to a more desirable lodger. There was, of course, an instant demand for explanation. Paul, looking wofully pale and wretched, came down from his room and begged to know if this was a piece with his other misfortunes. Madame explained in a distant way, which set Paul laughing as he pictured to himself the manner in which Peter must have executed his self-imposed task. He declared earnestly that he had never spoken of such a thing even in jest, and had no deeper regard for Frances than he had for herself. It pained him to see that, while Madame accepted his declaration, she did not withdraw her note nor drop the unusual coldness of her manner, while his request to apologize to Frances was politely ignored.

He returned to his room weighed down with sadness, but outwardly cheerful. One must carry his cross with a good heart. His possessions were few and his wardrobe limited. He packed up a few articles that evening, looked the door and gave the key to the servant, with instructions to have the furniture sold and the money given to Madame. He



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It is with gratitude and heartfelt thanks I pen these lines: My wife had lost all control of her nerves and could only speak at times, and was in a very low condition generally. She commenced using Father Koenig's Nerve Tonic on August 4th and a few days afterward she could come into the parlor and sing to the music and execute the solo part of hymns alone. It is also able to do work about the house. I am sorry that I did not hear of this wonderful remedy sooner for I could have bought twenty-dollar more bottles for what I paid the Tonic will be a blessing to all, and I can strongly recommend it. I send today for another bottle for my wife, and also for one for another lady whose nerves are weak, and whom I told what your Nerve Tonic had done for us.

JOHN MITCHELL.

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had tried vainly to see Peter. On a chilly but clear night in early spring he went out into the streets of New York almost a beggar, as he had once entered the city, having no place to lay his head, entirely bereft of friends save among the poor, sad and downcast, but still full of the hope which had always been his chief capital. He had enough money to assist him in carrying out his designs. He needed change of scene and rest, and he had decided that a few months spent in the country districts, travelling as only the impecunious know how to travel, out in the open air, among the mountains and lakes of the north, would once more set him in trim for the battle of life. He was not altogether cast down, and had no fashionable suicidal tendencies, nor even a very natural longing for death. There were many pleasant incidents ahead of him which, with the bracing air of night, gave his blood a new energy of flow and his pulse a gentle acceleration.

Such a wall as rent the air when Peter ventured to return and learned the story of his friend's departure was never before heard in the silence of the boarding-house. When the servant had informed the ladies of Paul's queer manner and mysterious departure they fell into an excessive trouble of mind. Suicides were not rare, and a young man weak from illness, bowed to the ground by a series of misfortunes, was apt to be unsettled in his mind and to find a dangerous fascination in the water. There was some hope in recalling Paul's strength of character and religious instincts, but still the ladies wept secretly over their unintentional harshness. The effect on Peter of the poet's departure was marvellous. He confessed to his own fictions, and thus established Paul's innocence of even a thought derogatory to Frances; he accused himself with tears of being the destroyer of his "boy"; he swore that he would never rest until he had found him, dead or alive; and he added a secret oath that Florian Wallace would never claim Frances as his bride. Nothing less than a threat to cut down his public lamentations. Thenceforward during all that spring and summer Peter was like a monomaniac in his search after the poet. He went about with that one idea uppermost in his mind. He made it a point to call at stated times on those who had discharged Paul from their service, and on the managers who had treated him so managerially, and to abuse them. Nevertheless there was no trace of the young man, nor did Peter cease to inquire after him.

Paul took a northward train, after he had stepped into the Bowery theatre and spent an hour witnessing a representation of his own rejected play, and near morning was landed at a pretty village half way up the Hudson. It was not a pleasant hour for entering a town, the air being chilly and the sun still in bed along with the villagers. Officials were sleepy and impolite, and the silent, echoing streets, the ghostly spires and eminences, had a heavy influence on a heavy heart. The bells of a distant convent were ringing, and smiting softly on his ear, brought a flush to his pale cheek. He turned his steps towards the sound, knowing that by the time he had walked the two miles of distance leisurely, the morning Mass would be celebrating and he could enter the chapel unnoticed with other worshippers. His thoughts went back to that happier time when Ruth's face had first stirred in him those aspirations and fancies so sweet in their passing. It had been many months since he stood in the world. She was hiding in the convent; those bells brought the blood to his cheek and quickened his unconscious step. What she was doing there he had never heard; why

he was visiting the place he had not asked himself, but a vague longing to see her again and to learn something definite of one who had unconsciously filled a large space in his life urged him on. He knew that she thought of him with gratitude. He had been the first to open her eyes to her real position, and she felt that whatever happiness her new life had given her was owing in fair measure to him.

He was very weak when he arrived at the chapel. The priest saying Mass was the only person visible in the sanctuary, on each side of which were deep recesses where the nuns sat unseen during the sacrifice, and only the voices of the singers told of their presence. He was sad as well as weak, and, as any man will do in God's single presence when bowed down with sickness and affliction, he wept a little. Life seemed so utterly cheerless at that moment, he was so lonely in the wide world, and one of his best and dearest, and most desired was so near and yet so far from him!

It was a very interesting face which presented itself at the convent before noon and inquired for the mother superior; so the lay sister thought as she ushered Paul into the parlor, his face was so pale, so sorrowful, so chastened. Mother Superior was also impressed by it as her visitor, in a nervous but gentlemanly way, began to speak.

"Some years ago," he said, "a lady friend of mine came here to reside. She was a Miss Pendleton, a Protestant, who had leanings toward the faith. I have heard so little of her since that time that I am anxious to know what has become of her."

"Miss Pendleton," said the mother superior, smiling, "is now Sister St. Clare, a novice in our order. She has been a Catholic almost since her arrival, but until a year ago did not consider that she had a vocation for the religious life."

"She is well, I trust, and happy?"

"Very well indeed, and apparently content and cheerful."

He was longing to ask permission to see her, but knew that it was against the rules.

"Will you oblige me"—handing her his card—"by giving Sister St. Clare my kind regards and best wishes, and asking her prayers for one who has great need of them. I am glad to know she has found rest. Some day when she is professed I may be able to call on her."

He went away sadder but pleased at the good fortune which had come to a noble soul. All day long he haunted the grounds, sketching the buildings and looking with moist eyes towards that part where the novices spent their leisure hours. Insensibly his thoughts strayed away into dreamland, and he began to draw on a bit of Bristol-board the outlines of Ruth's face as he had seen it last, very troubled, yet shining with the light of a new-born grace. He looked at his finished work, grief-stricken yet patient. Was he never to whisper into her ears the secret of his heart? Never. For another more noble than he had claimed her, and he could but write around the chill outlines his name and hers intertwined, with the words "I love you," twisted about in every fashion. The sun rose hot and red in the noon-day sky, and hunger

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drove him to the village. He left vent grounds, nor did he miss it until the bit of Bristol-board in the coat till the next morning when he was many miles from the place. He would have returned for it on the instant but that he remembered the rain-storm of the preceding night. The sketch lying six hours in the rain would now be a mass of unsightly pulp!

What a dreary heart he carried away with him! He had no fixed plans for his journey. He went wherever fancy and circumstances led him, and wandered for months by the Hudson, on the shores of Lake George and Lake Champlain, along the St. Lawrence, and among the Thousand Islands—places little frequented in those days. His arrival at Clayburg was pure accident, but once there he woke to sudden interest in Ruth's home. He had not improved much in his open-air trampings. Whether his heavy heart retarded recovery, neutralizing the effect of change of scene, fresh air and exercise, or his carelessness led him into fresh disorders, the day at least which found him looking on Clayburg from the top of the island described in the opening chapter was a day of special physical misery to him. He was still pale and thin, and his movements slow and uncertain, and any emotion sent the tears to his eyes and the sobs to his throat like a child.

And this was the village where she had lived and grown to sweet womanhood! How pretty its spires looked in the morning sun, and how fresh the wind blew from it to him! The thoughts which the scene aroused troubled him like pain. He sat under the shade of a stunted tree with his eyes fixed gloomily on the water, and wondered when his present self was to end. He was depressed enough to wish that it would find its conclusion here. She was lost to him forever, and he would rest among the scenes which she had loved.

"Sick," said a voice beside him. Scott was standing there.

"No," he answered, "not sick in body."

The sigh which followed the words told the poet's story very plainly, and Scott studied his pale face with attentive interest. He somewhat resembled Florian. Usually the hermit left strangers to themselves as speedily as possible.

"I don't think misfortune is always to blame," said he. "When sorrows begin to knock a man down it's part of his nature that he should knock down in turn. If he doesn't he must expect a kickin' as well. I dunno but he deserves it."

Paul looked up in surprise, and for the first time surveyed his companion. He saw nothing, however, to astonish him, but the words of the hermit rang in his ears pleasantly.

"Easy to talk," said he, "but cleverly said. It is like meeting a friend to hear such words, and I have no friends."

"None?" said the other, distrustfully. "A man must have done some pretty mean things to git like that."

"Perhaps the meanest thing I did was to run away from misfortune instead of facing it and letting it do its worst. The friends I had, God took from me for a good purpose which I have been slow to acknowledge. Never mind. I will go back to New York soon. I thought I was dying; that my tide of fortune, not taken at the full, was ebbing. It was

a mistake. I shall return, no doubt."

"A man sometimes runs too far," was dryly said, "to make gettin' back safe or necessary. Find a good battle-ground here, an' wait for your enemies."

Paul looked at him a long time in silent thought, and then at the scene around him.

"What do you do for a living?"

"Fish, hunt, plough for myself an' no other. I live alone among these islands, an' when I've done prayin' for myself I give some time to thinkin' of my brothers in the world. I never tolerate company. It doesn't pay; it brings misfortune."

He had seen a purpose in Paul's eye and question, and thus attempted to destroy it, starting down the steps to his canoe; but the poet caught him and held him, looking into his face with a fixed, earnest look not without a suspicion of wildness.

"I must go with you," he said, "for I know you now. Florian often spoke of you. In old times those sick of the world came to men like you for help and consolation. I am sick of it. You must take me with you. You will bear half my troubles."

"You're a little crazy," said Scott. "I have nothing to do with your kind." And he laughed at the man's feeble grip.

"Nothing?" repeated Paul, following him to the canoe. "You have nothing to do with such as I? Why, it was just such a sorrow as mine, perhaps, which drove you to this solitude. Let me be your disciple. We are like in many ways."

The hermit looked at him again sharply.

"Are you in earnest?" he said coldly. "If so, come. Put in practice the first rule of this place—silence."

Wordless the poet entered the canoe, and the prow was turned towards Eel Bay.

(To be Continued.)

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