

SOLITARY ISLAND A NOVEL BY REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH

CHAPTER XXVI.—Continued.

"Indeed, I know the creature," said Peter gruffly, "and so do you, Frances. That Mrs. Merrion, a bold—"

"O Mr. Carter!" Frances broke in with a gesture. "All right, if you'll have it so; but I know her."

"You have but one instance," said Frances, "and exceptions only prove the rule."

"There's a tendency among females," Peter went on, "to make matrimony the end of life. That was another idea in the novel."

"This going into a convent," said Florian by way of counter-charge, "I do not condemn, but neither do I like it. A woman's highest sphere and self-completion is in the married state, and so we look with pity on an old maid."

lighter complexion of the poet did not make the likeness striking or impressive, but on acquaintance it increased forcibly, and the invariable question was, Are they brothers or relatives? When Florian saw for the first time the features of his supposed father, the prince in the count's portraits, he was struck by the remarkable likeness to Paul Rossiter. Of this fact he said nothing to the count until that gentleman had been satisfied as to his identity with the son of Mr. and Mrs. Wallace. When they had returned to New York, and he was one day at the count's residence, he asked to see the portrait of the Russian prince once more.

"There is a young gentleman at Madame Lynch's," said he, "who looks more like this picture than I do. He has the prince's eyes and hair, which I have not."

"But you have the soul of the prince in your face," said the count shrewdly, "which he has not."

"Then you know of his existence?" said Florian. "I heard of it yesterday," the count replied indifferently, "and I was about to ask you for an introduction. I have a presentiment that the son of the exiled prince will be found in either of you."

"What! have you not gotten over your infatuation in my regard? Were you not satisfied with the Wallace credentials?" "Highly satisfied. But I spoke only of a presentiment."



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husband as Merrion. He can support with equanimity the rival attentions of a count and a Congressman."

"What a face you put on those matters!" said Florian in displeasure. "It is not in America as in France. Here there are no lovers of married women, only admirers."

"Only admirers!" mimicked the count. "Is a husband any more? But stop! I will meet you there to-night. A change has come over petite madame; we will discuss it. You seem to have gone far ahead of me in her esteem—I use an American word."

"You have no sincerity," said Florian, "and she is beyond you."

"I have sincere admiration and esteem, and I am a sincere count. Is not that enough for you. Au revoir. When you can come to the little games of chance let me know; and there is a great regret in my heart that you will not let me introduce you to some lady friends of mine."

"Nonsense!" Florian said airily. "I have too much to do now, and I shall not add any acquaintances to my long list."

"Once more au revoir. You will soon come to your senses. Life is a bed of flowers and we are the bees. What shall the bees do but sip the sweets? Eat, drink, and be merry."

new in this country to be played safely, although if any one could do it cunningly you are that one. No, my Nicholas, you must be more careful of your master's character. He relies on you chiefly. There must be no blood cast on his honorable name."

"There are ways of killing without shedding blood," said Nicholas—"without steel or rope—if I might try."

The count pretended not to hear him and went off into an inner room, while with an evil smile the man departed to execute his mission. He was very well fitted to perform the task of ferreting out Paul's antecedents, and still better adapted for such delicate work as assassination; but the count's word was law to him, and he dared not act against his wishes. His hint about destroying life without bloodshed the count did not actually reject. Vladimir satisfied his sense of honor with the reflection that in turning his back on the man he had turned his back on the proposition, but had he sincerely questioned his own heart he would be compelled to denounce himself as an associate of a murderer. Florian and he met at Mrs. Merrion's that evening, where a great crowd was assembled to enjoy the opening services in the religion of fashionable life. The first incense to the goddess of fashion usually ascended from Barbara's altars, and the worshippers were legion. The lady herself, in a more subdued costume and with a less pronounced manner, received her astonished admirers with none of the old sauciness. A gentle self-control was visible in her manner and sat very sweetly upon her.

"What do you think of it?" said the count moodily, as he met Florian examining her appearance from a distance.

"It will do for a time," Florian answered carelessly; "it has made a sensation already, which is sufficient for madame. And I must say it becomes her, and pleases her husband much."

"That is the worst of it," said the count: "when he is delighted it will surely last. I thought it might be a freak, and I tried to break down the reserve behind which she is entrenched. All in vain. Her armor is perfect, and I begin to feel she is in earnest about something. Has she caught it from you?"

"I think not," said Florian. "If she has, it certainly will not last. But it takes very well to-night, does it not?"

"With the crowd." And the count groaned as he moved away. Florian came up to Barbara presently and engaged her in conversation. She was very cheerful, if not gay.

"You look charming," he began, but she interrupted him with a look of pain.

"Pray do not," she said, and her lips quivered. "You ought to understand me better. Do you not remember your last visit to the seashore?"

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so am I. But I know our faith better than to suppose it demands from you so utter a renunciation of self. What will your guests think, what will society say?"

"They seem to like it to-night," she said, "and I can make the new manner as taking as the old. It is a more womanly manner, and such as your mother and sisters practiced, I believe."

He could not deny that, and cast about for another argument. "In a short time I shall have need to consult you about my entrance into the church," she went on. "I would have mentioned it to the count but that he is not a very good Catholic. I shall take him for my sponsor, perhaps, so that he may not utterly despair, and then, having a sort of responsibility concerning my spiritual welfare—"

"Oh!" said Florian, when she finished the sentence with an arch smile, "there is a glimpse of the good time when you were not spiritual. Do not lose it altogether."

"What advice from a Catholic," she cried with spirit. "It is shameful, as my conduct was before all the world."

"And you mean to do penance now?" "Perhaps; but you shall advise me. And tell me, how does your suit progress with Miss Lynch? Are you following where your heart leads?"

Overcome by a great and sudden wave of feeling, which seemed to be a compound of regret and longing, he answered tremblingly:

"No, I am not following where my heart leads; but we shall soon be married, I trust, when I have asked her."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Business matters began of a sudden to go very poorly with Paul. From the night on which his first comedy had been presented in the boarding-house parlors he had met with fair success in the dramatic world, but at that time fair success meant only steady employment for one or two or three theatres at the rate of twenty dollars a week during the season. On that sum he lived in his attic with comfort, but for reasons that will presently appear, did not save anything. His was a hand to mouth existence. He made nothing by his poetry. He could not produce it by the yard, and disdained to apprentice his muse to verse-carpentering. His chief annoyance was this want of reserve money. What if he fell sick suddenly? He would be entirely dependent on the charity of strangers.

He had lately finished a drama after the old fashion which popular taste demanded. For some weeks before he brought it to the manager, that gentleman had been hinting obscurely at a coming change in the character of the plays produced at his theatre, but he had talked of such a change so often that Paul paid no attention to him. When he brought his new play for official inspection Mr. Aubrey read a few lines in a hasty way and with much clearing of his throat.

"It will never do, Mr. Rossiter," said he, tossing the manuscript back to him. "The new system requires an entirely different style of play—less of fancy; more of poetry. It will never do, as you can easily understand."

Then your talk of change meant something," said the poet, aghast at this rude blow of fortune. "Well, when a man talks," said the manager stiffly. "I suppose he talks to a purpose."

"Except managers," said Paul, with indignation. "Don't attempt the professional rigmarole with me, Aubrey. Why didn't you let me know at the beginning what kind of a play you needed. I could have written it as easily as this."

"I did let you know many times, and you just admitted I did."

"See here—" began the angry poet, and then he stopped, for a sudden suspicion flashed on his mind. "Your tones—" began the manager frigidly.

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