

## SOLITARY ISLAND

A NOVEL.

By REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH.

## CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

"Wine?" said Peter, with a cough. "Ah, bother, man! what d'ye think I'm made of? Well, yes, I think I will, if ye say so," he added, seeing that Florian had poured it out quietly. "I dunno, though. Had I better, Paul? Paul, the pensive and poetical, with his long face and yellow hair! I don't think I will. I won't! It's late, an' it isn't good to be drinkin' before goin' to bed!" Florian, amused, assisted Paul to some wine, and drank without saying more to Peter, who sat with his thumbs crossed and a gloomy expression on his spongy face.

"I am glad to have met you," said Florian. "Press of business only prevented me from introducing myself long ago. I heard so often of your peculiar resemblance that I was curious to see you, and no doubt you had similar feelings."

"Yes, indeed," said Paul; "and I often thought it strange we should have been a month in the same house without meeting."

"There's a wide distance between the garret and the best parlor," Peter broke in; "an' seeing ye haven't the politeness to ask the old fellow, I'll take on my own account a mouthful. I hold a middle place," he added, as he held up his glass to the light and eyed it moistly. "I'm the ground, as it were, on which ye two meet and exchange views of each other. Well, here's to your future joys and sorrows; may the wan strangle the other—m!"

The last sound was the expression of Peter's satisfaction as the fiery liquid, swelling in his throat, bulged his round eyes outward; he shook his legs once or twice and then burst into a roar of laughter. His rough good-humor and oddities went very far to put the young men on an instant and happy level of confidence. It was impossible to get so near a fire and not get warmed, and in a very short time all stiffness was gone and they were talking with the freedom and assurance of old friends. Meanwhile Peter fell asleep beside the tears of Erin.

"Since our friend is gone the way of slumber," said Florian, "would you mind taking a walk before bed-time?"

"With all my heart," Paul answered. "Let Peter stay just where he is until our return. He's an odd old fellow, isn't he? And yet so kindly and jolly that you will forget annoying oddities and faults for the sake of his company."

"I have met him often enough," Florian said as they reached the street, "but never paid much attention to him nor he to me until tonight. I shall know him better in the future."

"I met him when I first came here, scribbling, like myself, for a living. We are of the same craft and took to each other on that account; and he has been of use to me in such matters as introductions to editors and publishers."

Paul did not add that no good had as yet come of these introductions, for Peter usually spoiled any incipient favor by his own after rashness and headlong determination to push by main force his young friend to the topmost round of fortune's ladder.

They had an animated talk from the boarding house to the Battery, and came quite unexpectedly on the open space looking out on the bay—so suddenly that an abrupt pause in the flow of talk passed unobserved, and in an instant the minds of both were far away from each other and the scene. Whatever Paul's thoughts might have been, Florian at least found himself looking with inward eye over the St. Lawrence as such a night as this with feelings of sorrow for the "might-have-been."

The waters of the bay were tumbling about in rude, irregular fashion, like boys at play, and across their foaming spectral vessels and dark shadows. At this hour the same moon was shining on a waste of ice and snow in Clayburgh. The lights twinkled from the snow-covered houses, and far away the islands stood dark and ghostly. Scott was there in his loneliness, reading in his cabin, or spearing pickerel by the light of a fire; and Ruth, the dear girl—ah? well, it was a little foolish, perhaps, to rattle the old sore for the sake of reminiscence.

They returned home still talking, and parted at Florian's door. "I am not here one-third of my time," said he to Paul as he bade him good-night. "My library is exceptionally good, and if you will take

advantage of it the premises are yours every day while I am absent."

Paul, thanking him warmly, accepted the kindness. On the second floor he met Peter with a lamp in his hand and a handful of coppers. "Ye asked me for five dollars, b'y," said Peter sleepily, "would ye mind taking it in coppers?"

With a laugh Paul ran up to his attic and left Peter to himself.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The kindly offer of Florian to his post-friend that he should make use of his library at all times, in which offer he veiled delicately his desire to make the attic less miserable, was eagerly accepted by Paul. In Florian's room he now passed a great part of his leisure time, finding among the thousand volumes scattered there his greatest pleasures. It surprised and pained him to see that very little distinction was made with regard to the orthodoxy of writers in the selection of books. Infidelity and Protestantism were well represented on the shelves, and volumes whose poisonous properties seemed almost to destroy their own pages with virulence and bigotry were common. He spoke of it wonderingly to Florian.

"Well," said Florian, "I found on coming here and plunging into politics, that it would be useful to be acquainted with all literature as well as the Catholic purely, and that our enemies had a side to the argument which might be worth knowing. So I bought everything that came my way, and read it merely for the sake of knowing personally the strong and weak points of an opponent. I can tell you it is a great help, and particularly in politics and society."

"But wouldn't you be afraid a little to handle such poisons? Our faith, after all, is as much an object of temptation as our purity, and must be well guarded. Nothing so easy to lose, nothing so hard to recover, as faith."

"If this is the best argument, the enemies of our faith have," waving his hand towards the book-case, "I shall never lose it. Of course, I would not recommend the reading of such books to every one, but in political life it is almost a necessity to know these things if you expect to rise."

"And you expect, of course," laughed Paul.

"Some day," said Florian, "I shall be well, never mind what, but you shall write my epic, and like Achilles, I shall go down to posterity embalmed in verses immortal."

Paul was hardly satisfied with his reasons for reading so many dangerous books. He began to consider him as not so strict a Catholic as Peter had described him, and wondered, after the shivering which seized himself when reading a blasphemous paragraph of Heine, whether any soul, young and unspiritual, could bear such a shock and many like them without serious injury.

Among the pictures which hung on the walls was one that brought a sudden surge of feeling to the poet's heart. It bore his soul away from the luxurious room to scenes where life went on as in the patriarchal time before books were invented, and

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when man lived in daily and open intercourse with nature. Florian knew something of water-colors, and had painted a sketch of Clayburgh bay and the distant islands under the first burst of a spring morning. A boat was putting off from the shore. A young man stood at the bow arranging some ropes, while in the stern were two girls in yachting costume, whose sweet faces seemed to be looking smilingly into his own. The dark-haired, dark-eyed witch in white was waving her handkerchief coquettishly at an unseen observer; her companion, with her hands clasped over one knee, was looking dreamily in the same direction. With this face the poet was captivated, and recognized in it a more animated description of a face which, hanging over the book-case, had already won his heart and began to trouble his dreams. He mused over it often and wove fancies at night concerning the maid—dangerous fancies, for it was possible that this face holding so prominent a position in the room was the beloved of Florian.

Musing, writing, and reading were the pleasant sunshine of Paul's life, and in this room the sunshine fell brightest. Often his musings were interrupted by the quick opening of a door and the rush of childish feet, and his neck was hugged by a curious specimen of an infant before he was aware of her presence.

"Ach!" was the first exclamation, "is this the Fraulein?"

"Yaw, Herr Paul," was the invariable reply, "das is me, de Fraulein."

"Stand back, and let me look at you," said the poet; "let me see how mother has arranged you this morning."

The child was a rather handsome eight-year-old, blue-eyed and yellow-haired, and most wonderfully arrayed in a mixed German and American costume. Her short hair was braided perpendicularly and ornamented with white bows of preposterous size while a blue velvet dress, white pantalets, and blue slippers with agonizing red rosettes completed the dress.

"That will do, Fraulein," he said gravely; "I think now you look like the president's daughter." And as this was the highest criticism he could pass on her, the Fraulein was made happy for the moment.

"How is the mother," was the next question—"the good mother that brought the Fraulein from heaven to Germany, and from there to America on the ship?"

"Vell," said the Fraulein briefly, "mit prayers to gif for Herr Paul unt all his frents."

"That is right," said the poet, holding up a twenty-cent piece. "Take this, Fraulein, for her goodness, and see that the good mother has everything needful. Now sing."

At this command the Fraulein opened her mouth and emitted a series of sounds so sweet and powerful that one looked in astonishment at the small, grotesque figure for an explanation. The Fraulein did the whole with no concern save for Herr Paul, whose mobile face showed very plainly whether she was doing well or ill, and on every occasion her efforts were gauged by the poet's expression. The child sang in German, French and English as Paul bade her, and with all the simplicity of a pupil and an innocent who looked for no praise save from her master.

"Very good, Fraulein; that will do for to-day." And she vanished down the stairs. Through the same performance she went daily for Paul, receiving her money, and retired unconscious that the poet went without light, wood, and many other necessities for the purpose of keeping her sick mother and herself in some kind of comfort.

"It's not a bad investment, however," Paul thought. "Such a voice as that will one day be a gold mine."

The singing of the Fraulein occasionally brought a card from Madame De Ponsonby Lynch, with a request for an interview, generally granted. It was the same old story—board to be paid for and no money on hand. Madame was a large woman physically, and, as far as a fashionable disposition would allow, large-hearted. She liked the yellow-haired poet, and was not at all anxious that he should pay her weekly dues. But Paul, though airy in his disposition, and could not be forced into a tete-a-tete with a female while his clothes looked so very poorly; therefore Madame pretended a feeling of nervousness that he would run away without making payment for the attic, and was favored in consequence with many ceremonious visits and insights into Paul's character and circumstances which he never dreamed of giving her. He regarded her, in his innocent way, as a stout, hard-fisted old lady with a soft spot in her heart, which periodically was bound to find, and congratulated himself on

finding it regularly and succeeding thereby in keeping poor shelter over his unlucky head. Then Frances, her daughter, had a very sweet face and a bright disposition, and was not unwilling, with all his poverty, to talk literature occasionally and let him play on her piano when strangers were not present. The boarding-house was extremely select. Paul wondered that he ever had the audacity to apply for the garret at a place where presumably a garret bedroom would not exist, but in the first setting out on a literary life he had thought the time would be short until his means would more than match the best parlor in the house.

"O, Mr. Rossiter!" was madame's first cry, and a very severe one, when he entered in response to one of the usual invitations, "here I have waited another three days over the time and yet I have to send you my card and ask for another interview."

"And I am always so willing to give it," said Paul reverently; "for I have nothing else to give."

"Well, well, well!" And she tapped her pencil on the desk, and put on her eye-glasses to examine the account for the twentieth time.

"I have taught all the gentlemen so to remember the right day that it seems hard to fail with you. Four weeks, Mr. Rossiter, and twenty dollars due."

The poet's face grew longer at mention of so large a sum.

"I'm sure I did my best," said he. "But these people don't appreciate genius. If you were the publisher, now, madame, I would have no hesitation. You understand me, I think, and you would make others understand me. But in these hard, matter-of-fact days poets will starve somewhat easier than in Queen Anne's time. I think of giving it up and going back to the country."

"It would be best," said madame, "but then there is no hurry. If you could oblige me with what is owing—"

Paul shook his head mournfully. "How can you expect it," said he, "when a man gets but five dollars for the labor of weeks? If I choose to write poetry of the band-box kind—ten minutes' work, you know—or write sonnets on the editor's generosity, then I might earn a little. But I never will prostitute genius that way, not even to pay my debts."

"Is it prostituting genius to pay your debts?" said madame. "Perhaps not," Paul answered; "but fancy an eagle running with the hens after a grain of corn."

"I might shovel coal," said he, "and be dependent on no one save hospital charity, or wear my life out in a shop as a clerk. But I only ask time, madame, only time; and as I paid you in the past, so shall I pay you in the future, I need time."

"Money is so scarce," began madame, who liked to hear him plead. "I have always heard the rich say that. Now, I think it plentiful, and it is. And how regularly you must get your money from your wealthy lawyers and doctors, and statesmen. O madame! do you stand in such need of a paltry twenty dollars that you call money scarce? And what would you do with your attic if I went? Poets are scarcer than dollars you know. And when shall you have the distinction of harboring a poet in your attic again?"

The matter ended, of course, as usual.

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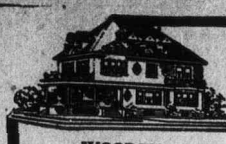
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Paul knew it would, and he went away smiling, yet sad, to wonder at the prospects of getting the twenty dollars. Peter was parading the third floor corridor in visible impatience.

"I was lookin' for ye, b'y. See what I have for ye! Smelt, the publisher of the Tom-Cat, wants a poem of three hundred lines—"

"Why do you bring me such commissions?" said Paul, flushing. "Smelt and his tribe of writers should be at the bottom of the bay!"

"But see—"

"I won't see! Write them yourself."

"Well, all right; only I can't, ye know! And then money is good under all circumstances where it is needed, and poetry is harmless even in the Tom-Cat. If I knew ye wouldn't do it, sure I could have got ye a twenty, ay, a fifty-dollar piece from Corcoran. He was speaking to me this very morning about ye writing an article on the battle of Waterloo, an' I, having the commission o' Smelt under me arm—one hundred and fifty dollars for three hundred lines—told him it was no use running after ye any more; that Smelt was willing—"

Paul groaned in despair. "You told Corcoran that Paul Rossiter was become one of the Smelt tribe! May perdition light on you, Peter (God forgive me!), that thus my good name should be destroyed!"

He seized his hat and rushed down to the street, Peter following at a distance and expostulating to the empty air. Corcoran was soon found and listened in coolness and mistrust to Paul's denial of any connection with the Tom-Cat.

"Of course it is not for me to throw obstacles in your way," said he. "Money is money wherever it is made, and you have a right to choose your market. But we could not think of employing any one who would prostitute himself to such a service. I am very sorry that the commission has been given out. I should have been happy to let you have it."

"Is there nothing else at present?" said Paul, laughingly. "A bill or two would not burden my mind at the present moment."

"Nothing," said the publisher frigidly, and Paul sadly recognized that one of the best of his many feeble sources of revenue was lost to him. "Nor can I say at what time we would be likely to have work for you."

"O, Peter, Peter!" murmured the poet, as with a jaunty, careless air he left the publisher and sought another in haste. He had a weird romance just fashioned out of his fanciful brain, and was anxious to dispose of it. It had been gotten up with all a poet's care, and he was sure that some one would think it worth twenty dollars.

"Very nice, indeed, and very creditable," was the publisher's comment, "but hardly suitable for our columns. Now, if the idea itself were taken and stripped of the gew-gaws of language"—Paul winced visibly—"it might do."

"Would he do it?" he thought. "Would he condescend to suit his cloth to so vulgar a measure?" He sat down with pen and paper, and in a few hours had all its beauty shorn away, and his story, deformed and ugly, was soon standing under the cold wind of outside criticism. What perversity tastes! It suited; and he went home twenty dollars richer and able to pay half his board bill. Passing through one of the poor streets and thence into a dusty lane where congregated the miserable poor, he came upon a scene of a recent destruction of furniture. A drunken fellow had made a wild display of muscle on his own property and had thrown the remains into the street. Among them sat a neat little woman, weeping, while on the remaining chair was a consumptive boy of fifteen, pale, wan, and mournful, a handsome lad, with hair curling close to his head, and despair and sorrow written over his poor face and dulling his heavy eyes. A keen pain darted through the poet's heart.

"Death is hard enough," he thought, "without adding such misery to it."

He talked a moment to the sick boy, who, seeing the handsome youth was interested, kindly told him their sad story. Father was good mostly but now and then drink got the better of him, and this was the usual result. He would be sorry for it next day and would soon mend matters.

"It will take a long time to mend these," said Paul, pointing to the broken furniture; and then he saw that the boy had painted the picture too brightly, for he grew silent and a shade of deeper despair settled on his face.

"You are not well," he said, quietly; "I am sorry for you."

"I will never be well, sir, and the sooner I go the better, don't you think?"

"Not at all," said the poet, laughing, and yet he was sick to see so much hopelessness in one so young. "Life is pleasant, even to the sick, and the world is full of the best people, if you happen to meet them. Take this"—and a ten dollar bill was slipped into the boy's hand—"and never give up, never be any sadder than you can help. Out of your very misfortune God will raise you up joys that could not come in any other way. Don't you see? This will buy you better furniture; and you shall hear from me again."

He did not wait to be thanked or look back as he walked away.

At the next grocery he bought wine and delicacies, and some papers at a news-stand, and sent all to the sick boy.

"If only to be happy for one day," said he, "with death so near him; if only to know that there is one soul who pities his misery and thinks of him dying!" Madame De Pon must suffer temporarily and I must freeze—thank God! with the will and the strength to stand the freezing."

He went home with tears in his eyes for the sorrowful face of the boy, and as he went a new resolve took shape in his mind. Five dollars a week was too much to pay when one could live more cheaply, if at the expense of his position in the estimation of the boarders and of madame. There were lunch-houses where the poor congregated. He was poor, and why not congregate also in the same places? he said humorously. The Fraulein was a heavy expense to him, while such incidents as that of the morning were distressing to his purse and were increasing his arrival.

"I am living too high for my means," said he, "and I must economize. Here are five dollars on my account, the rest to be forthcoming shortly; but you must not look for it too anxiously. If you could give me the attic for a certain sum, and let me board elsewhere, I think it would do very well."

Madame looked grave and seemed on the point of refusing, when Frances came in, but stopped, apologized, and was withdrawing.

"Come and plead for me," said Paul, who was a great favorite with the girl and knew it. "I have asked a favor and your mother is going to say 'no.'"

"Just imagine, Frances," said madame calmly. "Mr. Rossiter wishes to retain his room and board elsewhere. How can we permit it?"

"Why not, mamma?" said she. "I know it is the rule to do differently, and that you have never broken through it yet, but then—"

Not having any reason to offer, she stopped short and looked at Paul to continue. She was a simple hearted girl, with remarkably bright, soft eyes, and her character clearly pictured in her frank, sweet face, which Paul in his weaker moments often allowed to weave itself into his fancies with the face of the girl who sat in the yacht dreaming. He was young, however, and faces of this kind were apt to haunt him.

"But then," added he, "what will you do without your poet?"

"Has he ever been of any earthly use to us?" said madame, with unusual severity. "Have we ever seen anything from him save to justify his reputation?"

(To be continued.)