

SOLITARY ISLAND

A NOVEL.

By REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

"Mackenzie's in jail south," said he, "and here am I. Politically I'm dead and in jail, but just as soon as the thing quiets down I'm coming out in a way that'll not leave much breath in some people. Next year the sheriff's to be appointed, I'm going to be sheriff. Mark that, Flory, and that I told you so. And then you'll see fun. They've laughed and snickered at me long enough. Lord! what a laugh they'll have when I come out. A grasshopper couldn't fear it. And Buck's been at the head of it. He's your brother-in-law, Flory, I don't forget that; but his jaw has been going and going, and this laugh's been the loudest and longest, and so help me, I'll sell him and his 'piscopals out before I'm six months in office."

"O papa!" said Ruth, smiling, "how vindictive!" "Vindictive!" snorted the squire, with a snap of the fingers. "Yes, I am, but don't make no pretensions to any more charity than they've got, the hybrids!—cross between a Methodist and a Catholic, and that's the meanest kind of a cross. If I was in Congress I'd prohibit them. They'd have to be one thing or t'other, swing inense or rant. They ought not to be tolerated."

Florian nodded mock-seriously at Ruth. "There's a specimen of the American citizen," said he. "Having been kicked out of England for ranting by the incense-swingers, he's going to retaliate."

"Turn about is fair play," said Ruth. "But this is a free country," Florian replied. "Free country be—hem, g-r-r-r!" spluttered the squire, with difficulty crowding back an unruly expletive. "There must be a limit to freedom."

And seeing a curious expression on the faces of his two auditors he began to proceed more coolly. "We can't allow trash to overrun our country. We can't have the simplicity of our people spoiled by the trimmings and finixins of 'piscopals. If they're Protestants, let 'em stick to it; and if they're Catholics let 'em hang on to the pope, and we'll know how to deal with 'em. But there they come chanting and whining with flowers and robes, and candles, and bells, and crosses, and saying, 'We are not Catholics nor yet Protestants. We hate the Pope, and hurrah for the constitution; and that's all there is to 'em. They're hurting the morals of the people, and that's good reason for 'em to go.'"

"I told you he would come to that," said Florian gravely to Ruth. "Why, papa," said Ruth, "you have been giving us the arguments of the Inquisition in Spain against Protestants."

"Have I?" said the Squire, in vague wonder and alarm, trying in vain to think of an escape from his dilemma. "Yes, you have," said Florian, with cruel delight; "and you must now either eat your own words or swallow the Inquisition without sauce."

"Well, you see, Flory," said the squire desperately, "this is a new country, and principles and reasonings consequently take a new application." The laughter which followed this sentiment drove the squire from the room in shame and confusion.

"You young folks don't know anything," he growled as the door slammed after him. "I am going to-morrow," said Florian, when they had done laughing. He was glad to have this opportunity of speaking to Ruth alone and of discovering, possibly, whether fate had any more stones to throw at him.

"I knew you could not endure life here," she replied with much feeling, "after so many sorrows." "The one thing I most regret is that I cannot bring you with me, Ruth. You must know," he went on hurriedly, "that a very little time should decide for you and me whether we part or unite forever. In a year, if you say it, I will come back for you, Ruth."

He was unable to speak for a few minutes. "There is a year yet," he said at length; "you can decide better at the end of that time, perhaps." "Perhaps," she repeated. She was very calm in her statements, simply because she had gone over this scene many a time in the past few months. "But I think it would be better to end it now."

He was so pale and pain-burdened when she looked at him that her good sense faltered. "Have we really ever loved each other?" said he brokenly. "Do you know, Ruth, that if you persist we shall never meet again?"

"I know it," she said. "I will wait for a year, if you wish. We have been always under a restriction, you know, and I feel as if it made truth harder for me to learn, because you were to be the reward of my lesson."

"I release you," he said, rising. "I release you, Ruth, from any obligation to me. You are right—you always were. Good-by—for ever."

They shook hands, and with this simple ceremony his first love ended. Was he tempted to go back to his paradise and take her as she stood, difference of faith included? The thought did occur to him, as would the thought of flying. With a sad smile at its impossibility he faced the dying storm. His feet turned unconsciously to the grave in the church-yard, and, falling upon it, he moaned!

"O Linda! all our good fortune went with you!" "Not all," said the hermit's voice near by. He looked up indifferently and saw Scott leaning against a neighboring monument. He was covered with the falling snow, and must have been out long in the storm. Feeling ashamed of such a display of weakness, Florian rose and staggered away in silence. What the hermit never did before he did then—stopped the youth and held him.

"You're not yourself, my lad," he said, with a touch of tenderness in his voice. "And I'm told you're goin' away to-morrow." "Yes," said Florian, "to-morrow. Thank God! I'm done with this place for ever. There is nothing here for me but graves. You see, Scott, I have lost them all—Linda, Sara and Ruth. And the one nearest to me—isn't it strange?—is the little girl in her grave. Yes, I am going, and I wish it was morning and the whole place out of my thoughts for good. I don't care if I was dead."

"There's a difference between dead and dying," said the hermit grimly. "You'd soon change your mind if death caught on to you. You forgot to give me that paper."

"I'll write it this very night," Florian answered; "my last will and testament of the old life, and then hurrah for the new! God! how completely we can be torn up from the roots and transplanted in new soil."

"Bosh!" said Scott. "You kin no more get rid of the old life than of yourself. You'll think of all these things for years, an' you'll find them three women, an' the water, an' 'slands, an' boats, an' things, twistin' in your thoughts and promotin' your will until you're dead—almost. You're a little apt to get sentimental."

Florian said nothing, for a sudden daze came over his senses and he leaned heavily against the hermit, with his face upturned to the snow-clouded sky; and it so happened that the hermit's beard brushed his chin and the weather-beaten cheek lay for an instant against his own. "Faintin', hey?" said Scott. "You'll have a spell of sickness." "Not at all, I was just thinking of Linda's last words. They are a good motto as well as a prayer: 'That we may meet again.' Good-night, Scott, and good-bye. As usual you are right. The old life shall not out for the new."

stars or moon threw a mystic glamor over the scene. Moonlight falling on the staring backs of tenement houses is not a thrilling sight; but shimmering through an attic window, faintly lighting up its meagre furniture, mixing lights and shadows fancifully until the narrow space becomes a stately castle-hall—then the moonlight is a blessing. It had that effect in this particular attic, and although the air was cold enough to show your breath floating on it, where the light fell it looked warm, and almost persuaded Paul Rossiter, like the candle in Colonel Sellers' patent stove, that he was warm and had not sense enough to know it. The room might have been furnished—comfortably furnished—for all you could see in the dim light. A spectral bed with a white coverlet stood in one corner, a chair and desk littered with papers in another, and a stove sat reproachfully in the middle place, colder than the moonlight, and darkly pensive. It had an apologetic air about it, as if feeling it absurd that it should be there at all on a cold night when a stove has most to say and do in this world, and be silent and moody as Othello with his occupation gone. There was one picture on the wall, otherwise bare. Some clothes hung on a rack stretched across the door. These and the moonlight were all Paul Rossiter's possessions, and he surveyed them cheerfully while blowing his cold fingers and drumming his cold feet on the floor. He was writing, and writing was food and heat to him—that is, when his manuscripts were exchangeable into silver. Unfortunately they did not always have that property. A sudden and imperative knock at the door startled him, and he became quiet, the knock continuing for some time, and he continuing immovable.

"Open the door, b'y," said a rough, deep, middle-aged voice outside. "I know ye're in; sure the key's in the door. It's me, Peter, and I have something to tell ye."

A long silence succeeded this outburst. Paul did not move, but he was laughing quietly to himself. "Well, all right, if ye say so," said the voice, "but it's mean of ye, to be sure." Steps were heard retreating, then they stopped and finally returned. "Wouldn't ye like to go an' see the 'Green Bushes'? I've tickets for three, and we'll have the oysters after at Barney's. Saturday night, ye know, b'y."

But the boy was still immovable, although he shook with deep laughter at every new sentence, and perhaps regretted not being able to accept an invitation so suggestive—oysters and the theatre. "No admission to Peter!" said the voice in a mock soliloquy. "Then as sure's me name's Carter I'll expose ye. D'ye think I don't know why you are keeping me out, hey?"

Paul suddenly ceased laughing and listened, rigidly upright. "D'ye think I don't know ye've no fire, or—"

There was a sudden crash of furniture within, of hurrying feet and a door unlocking, and in an instant the voice, or Peter Carter, as he called himself, was violently pulled into the room. The lamp which he carried went out in the roughness of the encounter.

"Do you wish to blazon me all through the house?" said Paul, hotly; "do you—"

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"There was no other way of getting in," said Peter; "and then ye needn't be so proud. Not a soul but knows the poor young man in the attic is as poor as the poetry he writes, an' freezes as often as he composes! Not that they respect ye any the less, for if ye were rich as Croesus a poet's a hybrid thing in New York. Let me light the lamp."

Peter having performed that operation successfully, relit his pipe and sat down in the glare of the light, composed and happy. He was a short, stout, bow-legged man of fifty, with a bullet-head, and a moon-like face. His hair, short and gray, stood straight as quills upon the fretful porcupine, his under-lip protruded, his mouth was very homely, a scar half-way between tip and bridge of his pug-nose gave that feature of his face an ugly prominence, but his eyes were large and blue and sharp-looking, and would have been handsome but for the smoky eye-ball. Peter's general appearance was that of a red-faced, hearty farmer, given to social courtesies and rolling in happiness. He was round-limbed and round-bodied, rolled in his walk like a sailor, and, as we shall see later on, was fond of a good song, a good story, and a good glass of punch. He took his seat, smiling at the angry yet half-amused face which Paul had turned on him.

"Be George, Paul!" said he, with a malevolent grin, "but ye're the very spit of a poet, with your long yellow hair, and blue eyes an' melancholy face! An' ye b'y? It's nice to look at ye, it is. An' sure it's not mad ye are? Ye mightn't have let me in if ye didn't want to. I don't ask to come inter your old freezing room when I have one myself twice as good an' warm. I'll go now, if ye say so."

He made a pretended start and flourish with his legs, but did not move, and his jovial leer failing to charm the frown from the young man's face, he grew indignant. "Well, stay mad, if ye are so! What the devil do I care for you or your madeness? D'ye 'spose I owe anything to you or the likes o' ye? Not a snap o' my finger, ye half-starved verse-moulder."

Paul laughed at this outburst, and Peter himself joined in it and roared for a minute after Paul ceased, so proud was he to have succeeded in removing the displeasure of his young friend.

"But it's too bad, Peter," said the poet deprecatingly, "that you should let the whole house know I had no wood—"

"Ah, bother, man! What d'ye care for the whole house, or the whole block, or the whole city? Sure they know it already. And it's your own fault that ye haven't wood and candles! Plenty o' money, b'y, in this old sheepskin o' mine! I call on Peter any time you are in want o' fifty dollars, an' it's yours. Plenty o' money all over the world, plenty to eat at Madame Lynch's."

"Never think of to-morrow. With a smile banish sorrow!" And Peter, jumping up, executed a remnant of a jig through the room, tumbling breathless into his chair afterwards.

"I was thinking," said Paul gravely, "that I would borrow a little from you"—Peter looked suddenly indifferent—"and if you could let me have five dollars to buy some wood and necessities I wouldn't mind."

"Wood and necessities," mocked Peter gayly—"nice things for a young man like you, with strong muscles an' warm blood, to be thinkin' of. I tell ye you are twice as healthy in a room like this than if ye had a stove blazing up to heaven. And candles hurt the eyes! Ye shouldn't read after daylight, or use the eyes at all. See now! Dr. Brown says that the man who uses his eyes—"

"That isn't the point," Paul interrupted. "I asked you for five dollars." "Doctor Brown says that the man—"

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of putting his wordy generosity to shame. Peter was not at all uncharitable, although somewhat stingy at times, but this defect arose rather from a constitutional want of money and the consequent necessity of hoarding his little than from any inherent niggardliness. As he turned the subject of conversation when Paul seemed earnest in his demand for help, the young man was not unwilling to let it pass.

"I heard that assertion made about that lawyer's likeness to me," said he, "but I have never seen him. I fear you are fooling me about him. Now let us see how much of a resemblance there is between us. I have yellow hair, blue eyes, light complexion; what has he?"

"Brown hair, brown eyes, and light complexion," said Peter hesitatingly. "I wear a moustache, and my nose is Grecian as well as my face."

"He wears a full, short beard, and his nose is straight, if that's what you call Grecian, Paul."

"Where's the resemblance, then?" "I don't know; I don't think there's any. When you come to particulars you have us all. I had him down for the 'Green Bushes' and the oysters. I thought you might like to know him. By George, Paul! he might get ye a lift on some paper, for he's a rising man, makes speeches that take down the ward meetings. You'd like to know him, you would. He's a Catholic of the strict kind, I think. Sure I knew ye wouldn't like that, but a little of your company, poetry, and my punch would soon cure him of pious leanings. God help us all, but it's leaning all the other way I am since I left the old sod for New York an' its vile whiskey. I feel mighty dry, Paul, hey, b'y? Don't be putting such a long face on ye at this hour o' the night! My, but it's the mild face, anyhow. If some good girl gets it in her eye, sure it'll never leave it again."

He smacked his lips and laughed at himself afterwards. "Come on," said Paul, suddenly, "I'm ready."

Peter bounded off his chair and seized the lamp. "The lawyer has this Saturday night to himself," said he. "I'll go down and invite him, or will you?" "Will I?" said Paul. "You idiot! I invite a total stranger! Where's your etiquette or common sense?" "Just so," said Peter meditatively. "I'll see him myself."

He went down the stairs with a slow step and a sober air, as if the task of inviting the strange lawyer was not a pleasant one; and Paul, watching him until the light had faded to the first floor, saw him stand hesitatingly there, then retreat and return a few times, and finally go slowly to his own room. "O thou mass of contradiction!" he soliloquized, leaning over the stairway. "Thus Madame Celeste and the American pearl fade from before my vision."

LEIBIG'S FITOURE

He had not been over-anxious to enjoy either, and returned to his cold room to renew his writing, and blow his fingers, and stamp his feet, and draw inspiration from the moonlight, which shone more brilliantly as the night strengthened. A twenty-cent piece lying on the table gave him a new thought.

"The Fraulein will not come to-night," he said, "and I suppose I might as well invest in wood and tallow as let it lie there."

He donned his overcoat and went out hastily. Down on the first floor he met Peter just coming out of the lawyer's room, his face aglow with pleasure. He seized Paul suddenly and with a jerk landed him inside the door.

"Here's the twin," said he. "Be George, I've fixed it all, an' I'll leave it to your own mothers if ye aren't as alike as sun an' moon. Wallace, this is Rossiter, an' I'm Carter, an' we'll raise—that's right, Paul; make yourself at home."

The two gentlemen thus roughly brought together smiled and acknowledged the introduction. Then their eyes curiously sought each other because of the report of their physical resemblance. Paul saw a tall, elegant man of singularly easy and graceful manner, having an intellectual face half-covered by a beard. He judged that Florian might be somewhat reserved in his disposition and perhaps phlegmatic and cold, but there was no mistaking the high purpose of the man nor the breadth of his character. The poet liked the politician at the first glance. And Florian, now metamorphosed into a metropolitan young man, was glad to meet with a face so very different from those he had already seen since his arrival. He thought he recognized the poet, and was flattered that people saw a resemblance to Paul Rossiter in himself.

Peter meanwhile, in the full triumph of having brought this meeting about, was amusing himself through the room with the inspection of every article in it, and freely commenting on objects worthy of his notice. The furnishing of Florian's apartment was luxurious and appealed to the eye wonderfully. The leading color was a soft shade of green, fading into black or rising into white, with bits of statuary here and there, and a few water-scenes upon the wall. Peter had seen the room before, but had not been favored with a close inspection, and was making the most of his present opportunity. "Here we are," said he recklessly, "transported from a garret to a palace"—Paul stared—"and all on account of the resemblance between a poet and a politician! Paul, it's pretty complete, isn't it? It must be a nice thing to be a politician to afford such luxuries, and not poor devils like you and me, writin' bad poetry and editorials—hey, b'y? Don't ye feel proud of it?" said he, turning to Florian.

"Very," said Florian, "since you think so highly of it." "There's only one thing lacking," said Peter—"it's rather dry." And he twirled his thumbs and laughed at his own audacity. Florian laughed too, and went to the closet where the moisture usually gathered—"an arrangement to save the furniture," he said gravely.

Peter was suddenly offended. "We don't drink, Paul nor I," said he moodily. "Don't be taking up a poor old fellow's gay words so seriously. Don't ye know a man has two meanin's for everything he says? Ye're a politician an' ought to know that, I'm sure. An' if ye don't it's not speaking well for ye."

Florian, considerably surprised and mortified, was putting back the bottles on the shelf when Peter anticipated the movement by saying: "Of course, if ye have them out now, ye may as well let them stay, an' we'll get thirsty, maybe, looking at them. It's not often we drink, Paul or I, but brains will run out, you see, and, like plants, need moisture and sunlight now and then."

Florian began at once to understand visitor, and without further ceremony placed wine and brandy convenient to Peter's elbow. "Shall I help you to some wine?" he said, politely. (To be continued)

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