

## SOLITARY ISLAND

A NOVEL.

By REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH.

## CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

But it was too late. The boat cap-sized and threw the crew into the rough water. There being no danger, the squire raged and became profane. The girls both swam into shallow water and were helped ashore by Florian and the hermit. Florian was cast down with shame.

"The house is open to ye," said Scott, "and you young ladies had better light a good fire and dry your clothes or you'll catch an almighty tall cold. And when you go ashore again look out who runs the boat."

"It never happened before," muttered Florian, "and I'd give my right hand if it had never happened."

"There it is," said Scott; "mighty big pay for so little value. 'Twon't hurt the girls, I'm sure."

"I'm not," said the youth briefly, as he looked apprehensively at Linda climbing the rock in her wet clothes. However, they appeared at sundown with clothes dried comfortably, and none the worse, apparently, for their ducking. Florian had also put himself in proper shape and was entertaining the admiring squire with his account of New York and its notables.

"Ah! Florian," said he, "there's where you should be, among kindred spirits among the high-fliers."

"If I were a young man—" Scott said.

"But you aren't—you never will be. When you were you didn't follow your own opinions; so what use to inflict them on the young fellow, who doesn't care a button for your solitary way of living?" said the squire.

"I don't want the lad to live solitary, Pen'ton," said Scott; "let him stuble up, if he wants to, but let him stick to Clagburg and happiness. He'll go wrong sure, if he gets out into these dizzy conventions. He hasn't got the right—well, I don't know what to name it, but here's the place for him to thrive."

"Theory, theory!" Scott, I'm obliged to you for what you've done, and if I could make you a sensible man I'd do it; but I can't, so call and see me and Ruth—she's sweet on you—when you feel like it. Come, girls, home, home to that confounded government."

He ran down the shore to the boat after a hearty hand-shake with the hermit, while Ruth poured her gratitude upon the solitary.

"It's all right, miss," said he. "I'm content, and I hope you'll pray for me that I may never be more unhappy than I am now. Go ahead, I'll call to see ye some time."

He stood on the rock in front of his house long after they started.

"It makes me lonely to look at him," said Linda—"we going to our cheerful homes, he to his solitude."

"He is like a man dead," said Florian; "the world leaves him, but what kind of loneliness is it to be face to face with God?"

The next morning Linda awoke with a high fever and a slight cough as the effects of her wetting the day before, and Florian felt a severe twinge of grief as he saw the extreme pallor of her countenance and its faulty bloom.

She had taken a chill during the night, but a little addition to the bed-clothing had banished it. No alarm was felt. In healthy people these little irregularities occur and pass away, and so it would be with Linda. Mrs. Winifred, however, was anxious. The girl was not strong, she said; a doctor could be easily summoned; and then no one knows what might happen.

Youth laughed at these anxieties until pain came to add its warnings—pain in the lungs, sharp and distressful—and the cough grew more racking with every hour. Towards night it grew serious. They tried their old house-remedies and wished to treat her illness as a cold, a mere cold, which youth and health would throw off so easily. But in vain.

Linda grew more feverish and caught her breath more frequently. She was banished at last to bed and the doctor called in.

There is his knock at the door. Every one looks cheerful on hearing it, and the physician, smiling as he enters, gruffly desires to know what people have been doing to get sick this fine weather. Why, even the old are full of silly thoughts of escaping this year's rheumatism! And Linda, there with her brow contracted with pain! Pshaw! nonsense! Pain in the lungs? How do you know it's the lungs, you—you female? What do you

men know about the lungs? Lungs indeed! Pains when you breathe, hey? Ah! where have you caught cold? Duck in this weather? Yacht upset? Who upset it? Never mind who? But I will mind, and I'll call him a donkey, an ass, a mule, to upset a yacht with a woman in it! Why not have drowned at once instead of coming home to take pain in the lungs, and get a fever and a pulse at one hundred and ten? Why go out on the water in stormy weather?

"Why do anything naughty and nice?" says Linda between two frowns of pain.

"There's Eve over again," says the doctor, writing out prescriptions with a laugh.

Mrs. Winifred is laughing, and Billy also, and even Florian tries to persuade himself that the laugh is unprofessional. Directions are given, medicines are bought and administered; there is running and coursing through the house for a long time; the night-lamp is brought to Linda's room and arrangements are made for watchers.

"I'll call at two o'clock in the morning," says the physician. "I'm going out ten miles in the country, and I'll call coming back; have the door open for me. Good-night, Miss Linda. You had the 'nice' yesterday; you are having the 'naughty' today."

Outside he looked significantly at Florian.

"Pneumonia," said he—"not necessarily fatal, but apt to be. Follow my directions to the letter until I return. We may bring her through."

Florian stood holding the door and looking out into the glowing autumn night. The cheery voices of sailors came up from the river, and the lights at the mastheads shone like colored stars. He was hot and disturbed. Linda's days were over, perhaps, and that one dear obstacle to his ambitions was to be removed by death. He went in again with a smiling face, and ran against Mrs. Winifred crying silently. What could he say? Death was bitter enough, but she was to suffer death so often that he hastened on into the sick room and left her inconsolable.

"Shall I stay with you," he asked, "or do you prefer to sleep, Linda?"

"I can't sleep," she answered with a hushed voice; "and if I doze it is better to have some one near and the lamp burning. I am very ill, Florian, and I am afraid."

"Afraid, dear?" trying successfully to steady his voice. "Afraid of what?" though he knew right well the cause of her fear, and trembled because of its truth. How sad he would feel if death stole on him so suddenly, and he so young!

"Of death," she answered. "We talked of many things, Florian, but never of that, never of that! And it is so hard to die. Tell me something of it, Florian; you have read of it many times."

"If you are near to it," said he, "your own feelings can tell you more than books or men. Mostly the dying are indifferent to the agony, particularly where they have led good lives or innocent lives like yours, Linda."

"Yes, yes, I led an innocent life," she said simply. "Thank God for that! Innocence is something."

"It is all," said Florian; "it has never known sin, and does not know suffering. But what a subject for a patient who is to get well. It would be better to go to sleep, or shall I read to you?"

"Read to me, Florian, and talk as you read."

He went down to his study to select a volume. There were many books in his possession, and he knew them all by heart: dangerous books none of them, only the best and purest grain of the world's harvest.

What would he select? Nothing too pious, for that would frighten the poor child; nothing too frivolous, for that would not suit the condition of one so near death. He walked suddenly to the window, checking. "Do I realize it, Linda, that I may lose you?"

He took out Bonaventura's Life of our Lord, and when he had gone back to the sick-room, and had announced the story of the Passion, she was not surprised at the subject.

"It is so appropriate," she murmured. "I am having my passion."

He read to her until her eyes closed in uneasy slumber, and then sat watching the flushed face and thinking. Mrs. Winifred was the only other person who came near the sick-

room, and she was unable to control her tears even under Florian's reproach. She remained a great part of the time in self-banishment, and he dwelt alone in the sacred silence of a sick-room. Linda was fond of white and light colors, and her chamber was fitted up accordingly. The dim light it looked like a dream. Her pale forehead and flushed cheeks on the pillow were more an outline than reality. It scared him when he thought how short the time until they might be on another pillow in the graveyard.

"Linda!" he called suddenly in an overflow of anguish. She awoke with a start, and at the same instant he heard a carriage at the door.

"The doctor has come again, dear," he said. "Did I frighten you?"

"No," looking around in amazement, and then, with a sigh, realizing her sad position. Mrs. Winifred brought in the doctor, who was tired and grumbled very much, with healthy sense of slight discomfort which brought a new atmosphere into the sick-room, and certainly banished the presence of death. He was busy for a long time with remedial measures, and Linda's patience, and even Mrs. Winifred's tears, but looked so hopeful while he announced his intention of calling in the morning that all were reassured. The remarks outside the door were: "I can tell better later on whether she'll recover or not."

When the news went out of her dangerous illness a number of friends called, but very few got farther than the parlor and Billy, whom Florian had established there as a guard. Ruth and Pere Rougevin alone were admitted along with the doctor, and, seeing them, Linda began to fear because of all the trouble in her life. Three visits from a doctor so short a time, one from the priest, and the distant sound of doors closing frequently, with many little circumstances to which she had hitherto paid no attention, were at last ominous; and even while they stood about her smiling cheerfully she closed her eyes to keep back the bitter tears that would fall in spite of her determination to be brave and hopeful. They understood the reason of the grief, and could say nothing. Even the doctor felt it beyond him to be gruffly hopeful and reassuring for if she were to die, that better than the knowledge should come to her in this manner than to have a formal pronouncement of her doom. He had promised to tell that morning if there were chances for her recovery. The promise was premature. There were no graver tokens, no nearer approach of the dread angel, and he could but vaguely say "tomorrow" as he went away.

Sara, coming in as her sister's tears were falling, was impressed, as only her shallow soul could be impressed, with a wild fright that prompted her to scream. Fortunately she restrained the inclination, since it was purely personal, and a little thought convinced her that it was another's, not her own, death-bed she was attending. Pere Rougevin prevented a scene by banishing the whole company, herself included, from the room, leaving Ruth to attend the patient.

"Wait," said Linda feebly. "If I am going to die I must get the sacraments."

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"I can do nothing more than hear your confession," said the priest; "you are not in sufficient danger for the reception of the others."

The look in Linda's eyes was a very pleasant one at this precise, official declaration, and it said clearly that she regarded Pere Rougevin, stout, flushed, and short though he was, as an angel.

"I thought I was dying," she stammered.

"Nonsense, child! But you may die, and it's well to be prepared," he said. "You must be ready to live or die, as God wills."

"Alas!" murmured Linda, with a fresh flood of tears, "I am only too willing to live."

"There is no sin in that," was the sententious remark, and she proceeded with her confession.

"I must be very bad," she said to Ruth afterwards when they were alone. "I am terribly afraid of dying."

"Who is not?" said Ruth. "And then it is so near us always. I have tried to get used to the thought of it, but I can't. I suppose it does indicate a lack of some good religious feeling that we all ought to have."

"I must ask Florian when he wakes. Ruth. He knows everything. I wonder would he be afraid if he was called on suddenly to die?"

"Perhaps not so much afraid as grieved to leave his dear ambitions," Ruth replied, with a tone of gentle irony that escaped Linda. "But no more talking, please. You have every chance to live, but there is no use in being prodigal. I shall read to you."

She read until Florian had slept off the night's weariness and came again to his sister's bedside.

"There is one thing I should like to be sure of before I die," murmured the sick girl.

"What?" cried Ruth, "already so reconciled to death?"

She smiled and said: "No, no; but lying here so weak makes me feel that way, I suppose. I should like to feel in dying that your doubts were settled, Ruth, and that Florian and you would soon be married, if it could be."

"That must be as God wills," answered he with a sigh, as Ruth turned away her head.

"Still," said Linda hopefully, closing her eyes in sleep. "you will not leave us while Ruth wavers, or Sara and myself too."

"Be sure not," answered Florian; and he was not at all hopeful that any of these chances would turn out as he wished. When she was asleep he drew Ruth to a distant part of the room.

"Ruth"—and he took her hand and pressed it—"you heard what the dear girl said just now. May I not look to you for comfort should Linda go? Do not think me selfish or indifferent, but this indecision cannot endure longer without injury to both of us. What a happiness and real help to Linda if you could give a favorable answer very soon! Let me urge you, Ruth, to hasten."

"Pray do not speak of this now," she replied coldly, and much hurt. "It is poor taste, but I can decide, I think, very soon."

He thanked her and they continued to converse until Linda awoke. Mrs. Winifred, in the meantime, had entered in a surreptitious way, and was allowed to remain, being in a more hopeful and less fearful mood than on the previous day. It was characteristic of the position she held in her own household that Linda very rarely inquired for her.

The next day was a very pleasant one for the whole family. At ten o'clock the doctor announced that Linda would recover from the present attack, and therefore the timid ventured to approach the sick-room with smiling faces. Billy himself came in advance of a distinguished and unexpected visitor, the hermit. In his solitude Scott looked picturesque with his rough ways and dress, and curly red hair; but in the dainty sick-room he was as much out of place as an Indian in full war-paint. All were startled, and Mrs. Winifred so much so as to lose her senses. Old habits are strong, however, and she offered him a foot-stool instead of a chair, vainly feeling for its absent back while her eyes stared rudely but helplessly on the apparition.

"No, thank ye. I'll not come in," said the hermit, with his eyes fixed on Linda. "I just heard the little girl was sick, and I thought it might have been the duckin'. I'm glad you're better, miss. Take care of yourself. Good morning."

He was off in an instant, but Florian seized him almost rudely and pushed him into his study.

"You are very kind," said he, "and you must not go until you are thanked and hear all about Linda."

"She's getting well," said the hermit. "I reckoned so from her eyes."

Scott began to examine the books in the room with interest.

"All of 'em good, sound ones," he said. "If their names mean anything."

"Would you like to borrow some?" said Florian.

"No, thank ye; I hadn't no need of 'em, but I'm right glad to see you with sich books. I guess I'll be goin'; I'm kind of hasty in my calls, but usually I don't make any."

"We're so obliged to you," Florian replied, "and would be very glad to see you again."

The hermit made no remark as he left the room and ran against Mrs. Winifred outside in the hall. The lady evidently wished to say something, but was disconcerted at the right moment. Florian felt like laughing.

"What is it, mother?"

"Linda!" gasped Mrs. Winifred—"the gentleman—seemingly—"

"Oh, Linda would like to see you before you go, Scott."

"Anything to oblige the young miss," said the hermit, and he followed Florian into the sick-room.

"I wanted to thank you," whispered Linda; "you are very kind. Send me some wild flowers—the very latest."

"You'll have 'em to-night, miss," said the hermit. "Good-day, ma'am—good-day."

And he hurried awkwardly from the room, ran once more against Mrs. Winifred, and examined and pronounced judgment on Billy's grapes to the old gentleman's satisfaction.

"I shall call on you soon," said Florian as they parted.

He merely bowed gravely and walked away.

"Evidently," said Ruth, "your visits will not be the most welcome."

CHAPTER IX.

Linda during the next two weeks slowly continued to improve, and by the middle of October was sitting cheerfully in the warm parlor, with every soul in the house and many more out of it her devoted slaves. Choice flowers came from Mr. Buck, through Sara, to call back the summer to her room and have it live again in their sweet perfumes and gay colors. Squire Pendleton brought his fearful voice daily to her court, and related over again the new and old phases of his political exile. Mrs. Winifred was profuse with seemingly, and Billy quarrelsome for the sake of the smile his ragged utterances brought to play upon her cheeks, like sunlight over snow. Ruth's gentle touch and sweet eyes were there most frequent, and most welcomed; and Pere Rougevin and Florian made up a background of spiritual and physical lights that were very dear to the sick girl.

When she arrived at this stage of returning health, Florian made ready to visit the hermit for a week's hunting and fishing, as he had long intended to do, and was anxious to do before the bad weather came. "More for the purpose of studying the hermit," he explained to Linda, "and learning the secret of his happiness, if there is any."

Linda took up a bunch of ferns, arrived that morning from the kindly solitary, and buried her face in it.

"You but waste your time," she answered, "as far as he is concerned. Still he is a good mirror. You will certainly learn something about yourself."

She said this in the tone of a hint, which Florian received with a laugh that discovered him.

"Your sickness has made you sharp," he said. "Well let me confess, I do go to study myself. What then, Cassandra?"

"Cassandra, indeed!" she pouted, and then surprised him with a sob and a few tears. "I am so weak yet, Florian, and I know you are only going to ask his advice about leaving here. I want you to promise that you will tell me every word."

"I am not so certain that he can or will advise me, Linda. Because he is solitary, he does not know everything. Nor would I be apt to follow his advice if it went against my own desires. But I promise you, my dear, and you are quite right. I am going on my retreat."

He sat looking at her with troubled eyes. He never looked at her

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otherwise since sickness first struck her down, and his first sensation of real grief was gnawing at his heart as he thought of what he should lose in losing her. And unconsciously, too, he was studying the course of feeling in her bosom, the gradual ripening certainty of death which, amid doubts and fears, was already blooming in the girl's heart and soul.

Ambitious as he was, death had always appeared to him as a great monster who might at any time destroy his ambitions. He had never yet come in contact with it. But now it had seized most surely on Linda, and he watched its process with a sort of fascination that sickened soul and body, and crowded his dreams with terrors. He must come to this one day. How soon?

It filled his heart with a disgust for life and its ambitions that all his days he must walk under the threatening shadow of that greatest misfortune. Why live and work at all when death might shatter the handiwork of years at one blow? The reasoning was poor and foolish, but his melancholy had to find vent.

When he started one mild afternoon—mild for that northern climate—to visit Scott he met Ruth on her way to call on Linda.

"I am going," said he, "and I want to speak with you. You know why I am going."

"To fish and hunt, I believe," she answered absently. Linda's failing health was a drag on every one, and quiet Ruth was too saddened to feel interested in anything just then.

"And to think," he added impressively. "Matters are becoming muddled considerably, and I feel like one in a tempest. I must think. Sara's conduct annoys me. Linda—well, well, I won't speak about her. The angels are urging me towards New York, and you and I, Ruth, you and I, will need to talk calmly very soon." A deeper shade settled on Ruth's quiet face.

"I am going on retreat, in fact," he continued, "and the hermit unconsciously must be my director. Pray a little until I return, for yourself and me. Good-bye, dear."

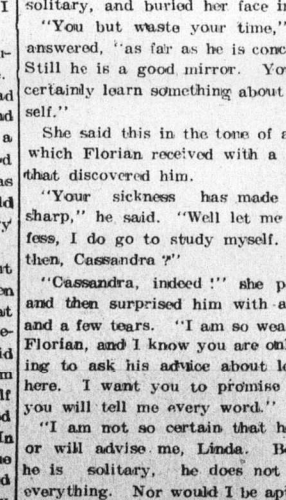
She gave him her hand, and he held it thoughtfully. He was not given much to romance or sentiment. His ambition toned every feeling in him, but he thought as he looked at the fair fingers lying in his own how very near he stood to losing the right to clasp them so, and of the two other women whom different fates were snatching from him—apostasy and the grave.

(To be Continued.)

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I have seldom seen a sky without some bit of rainbow in it. Sometimes I can make others see it, sometimes not, but I always like to try, and if I harbor no worse thought of them than that they have not had their eyes examined and fitted with glasses which would at least have helped their vision.

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