

# SOLITARY ISLAND

A NOVEL.

By REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH.

## CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

"Now, see here, Pen'ton," said the hermit, bluntly, "don't you know you've made a fool of yourself in this matter?"

"Yes, of course I do. I admit it. Go on, confound you! A fool who wouldn't make a fool of himself talking with you! It makes me foolish just to look at you."

"Sh!" cried Florian, with sudden and tragic emphasis. A death-like silence fell on the place. Ruth threw her arms about her father, and the hunter blew out the candle.

"I'll reconnoitre," said he, and stole away. Not a word was spoken until he returned.

"I think all's quiet," he said, relighting the candle, "but the best thing to do is to get to bed, or the next warning might have some meaning in it. You, miss, can have this room here, and take the candle along. Your paw an' the youngster kin take the floor with a blanket."

Ruth took the candle and kissed the squire good-night with an anxious face. As she was passing into the room Florian whispered:

"Don't be frightened. I only did it to stop the argument."

She laughed and went in.

"There's your blankets," said Scott, throwing them on the floor.

"Good-night."

And without paying any attention to their protestations, he opened the door and was gone.

"A nice fellow, by gum," were the squire's last words as he glided into the bass of an all-night snore. Florian himself was already asleep, and a real stillness, for the first time that evening, dove-like, settled on the little island. Florian's dreams were very beautiful when the moon, extricating itself from the clouds, looked in through the little window of the cabin and shone on his upturned face. It seemed to him that a sublime figure stood beside him. It was an angel, before whose radiance the moon grew dim, and his broad wings stretched from horizon to horizon, long spears of brilliancy. On his face rested a smile so heavenly that Florian stretched out his hands to invite its embrace. The angel stooped and kissed him; he felt the cold lips and the cheek on his own, and at once felt all his glory departing. With a cry of sorrow he awoke. All was stillness around him and the moon was smiling through the window.

"A dream worthy of the place," said Florian. "I'm going to see the island at two o'clock in the morning."

He jumped up and was preparing to go out when a low moan met his ear. It was smothered and distant, yet the agony was so exquisite that a sudden tremor of fear seized him. He tried to locate it, but in vain, and hurried out into the open air. The moaning never ceased for a moment, and the anguish was so keen that Florian ran hither and thither in great trepidation, but no trace of the cause could be found. The huge boulder on which the cabin stood was searched on all sides. Away from it the moans grew fainter, yet around it they seemed far off and smothered, and although he continued the search until they died away entirely, Florian could discover no one.

Somewhat relieved, he got out his boat, trimmed the sail, and started down the river. The violence of the wind had abated, and the charm of the night was far beyond the praise of words, so weird, so unreal, so supernatural was every tint that the moon's delicate brush laid on the canvas. After an hour or two he returned and sat down on a bench that overlooked the river. The aurora had already announced the day, and the witchery of night had vanished into dull gray shadows. He heard a noise below him at the river's edge directly under the boulder. Taking the shelter of a bush that grew there, he looked down to see the hermit quietly standing there with his eyes turned to the sky. He was weeping, and his face was pale. Florian drew back and fled softly to the house. He had no wish to play the spy, however great his curiosity, and as he lay down his heart was full of a great pity for this lonely man whose heart responded so quickly to emotions of sorrow.

no peace until she had worried some information from her concerning their midnight adventures.

"We sailed to that little island where Scott lives," said candid Ruth, "and sailed back again. There was nothing more to it."

"Where is that island?" said Linda. "What is its name?"

"It has none that I heard of. It looked so lonely and small that I named it the Solitary Island in my own mind."

And so the island was thereafter called by all who were concerned in the squire's escapade.

"I must go and see it some time," said Linda. "And Florian did not get spiteful once the whole evening, nor say harsh things, nor got moody?"

"Why should he?"

"Well, he was in a queer state of mind that night," said Linda, "although he didn't show it, nor tell me why. I thought something was going to happen."

She said this so roguishly that Ruth blushed; but neither did she reply to the innuendo.

"I see I must out with the whole thing, you stubborn heretic," Linda went on. "Now tell me, please, haven't you and Florian come to an agreement about your future life?"

"Long ago," said Ruth.

"But that's the old story," pouted Linda. "It was 'if here and if there. What I am dying to know is, if you have done with 'ifs.'"

"No," said Ruth briefly.

"Then his heart failed him at the last minute, for as sure as Florian rowed across the bay so sure was he of ending suspense that night," said Linda, "and I must say I am glad of it, for while you remain on the fence, Ruth, she will put off his departure for New York."

"He will not have to delay long," Ruth said. "I am pretty near a decision now."

"Oh, you are coming down off the fence, Ruth, you are going to stay on the Methodist side. I can tell it by the length of your face. And you so sensible, so tender about public display, and all that. I credit you with better sense. Well, I'll go to see you sit on the conviction bench and hear you shout glory when the spirit seizes you."

"There are Methodists and Methodists," said Ruth meekly.

"Forgive my impertinence," Linda pleaded. "You would make Mormonism sweet if anything could. I shall not pester you with questions any more, but leave everything to time and le bon Dieu. But oh, my heart is just bound up in the idea of being your bridesmaid, and it will break into little bits if I am disappointed."

Ruth said nothing, but she looked as if the disappointment were even then a settled fact, and Sara appearing at that moment attended by her clerical admirer their chat was ended. If Mr. Buck were at all doubtful of the feeling towards his matrimonial intentions held by the Wallaces, he was thoroughly enlightened that morning. He had escorted Sara home from the post office, which was the heaviest dissipation his affection would allow, and encouraged by the young lady herself and by Florian's absence he had ventured to enter the house, not as a suitor but in his ministerial character. It was unfortunate that Mr. Wallace should have seen the promenade and also have attached a meaning to it. He had followed them nervously, struggling with the emotion which excited him. Mrs. Winifred was putting out her best cake and her choicest wine for the visitor, and Sara was modestly tittering over a grave joke from her lover when Mr. Wallace appeared in the doorway and mysteriously beckoned to his daughter. Sara cheerfully came to him and they went away together. Those in the parlor heard sound of gentle scuffling outside, and faint smothered exclamations in the distance. Linda at a glance from her anxious mother excused herself, and went to examine into the mystery. Another exclamation and the banging of a door followed her departure, and then there was profound silence. The young ladies did not return, and Mrs. Winifred grew exceedingly nervous. When half an hour had passed and there was still no sign of their reappearance, she begged to be excused a moment and went in search of them. Both the minister and Ruth, chatting agreeably on odd matters, heard the same exclamation and door shutting as before. Mrs. Winifred did not return, and Ruth felt the situation getting awkward. Suddenly Mr. Wal-

lace's head appeared at the window.

"Good morning, Mr. Buck, you haven't seen my grapes yet. Finest in town: come out and see them. Take your hat along. Never mind Ruth, never mind excuses, come along."

Mr. Buck was delighted with the sociable freedom of the invitation, and excusing himself joined his prospective father-in-law in the garden. Mr. Wallace was not a diplomatist. He went straight to the end he had in view regardless of proportion or perspective. He put a load of grapes into Mr. Buck's arms in spite of the minister's gentle protests, and sent him home by the south gate of the garden with many invitations to call for another load at his pleasure. Mr. Buck, of course, gave his grapes to the first boy he met and went away downcast in spirit.

Ruth sitting patiently in the parlor and wondering at the odd disappearance of the ladies, heard once more the mysterious sounds in the rear of the house, sounds of struggle, faint laughter, door-pounding, and finally her own name in the faintest tones of Linda's voice. She went out in the hall, then into the dining-room, and came to the kitchen door. The disturbance was all within. The door was locked, and the key was on her side.

"Shall I open it, Linda?" she asked.

"Yes, do," said Linda in a choked voice. She turned the key, and found Mrs. Winifred and her daughters in the kitchen, the poor lady deeply distressed, Sara crying, Linda laughing.

"Seemingly," began Mrs. Winifred.

"There is no such thing as accident about it," sobbed Sara. "It was a plot to shame me, and I declare I'll not stay in this horrible house an hour longer."

"You see," said Linda gravely, "father was displeased with Mr. Buck and took this way to get rid of him. He trapped us one after another, and left us here, and heaven knows what he has done with the poor gentleman."

"He took him into the garden to show him the grapes," said Ruth.

"They did not return, so I came to look for you."

"A nice party," said Mr. Wallace's voice in the dining-room. Linda put her two arms about him and dragged him into the hall.

"You are the cleverest man," she said, "that ever lived, but what did you give us such a fright for? Wait till Florian hears of it!"

Mr. Wallace had not once thought of his son's opinion and grew so alarmed in an instant that Sara had time to escape to her room unscolded, and further humiliation was spared the family, whose members in Florian's absence were at the mercy of their eccentric head.

"Perhaps he'd better not know," said the old gentleman. "He is particular, you know. I gave him the best grapes in the garden. Do you think he'd mind it? But I won't give him anything else from this house."

He was getting nervous again, and Linda put on a serious face.

"Better not speak of it," she said.

"Go out and talk a walk, father, and I'll see that it's smoothed over. I would not have Florian hear of it for the whole world."

"No, of course not," said Mr. Wallace. "You'll see to it, Linda. I'll send him some grapes—the best I have."

When he was gone Linda could laugh at will, but Ruth was still mystified.

"I don't understand anything," she said.

"It's miserable enough," Linda replied, "when one comes to think of it. Mr. Buck and Sara are in love and father has just perceived it. They will get married too at the first chance. Was there ever anything so wretched? The poor girl has no more—well, let the faults pass. She will get married, and let her faith go as easily as she gives up her name. That's the meaning of all this trouble. Father just guessed it, and locked us up in the kitchen. I wish there was an end or a beginning to these things."

## CHAPTER VII.

Florian returned from New York one week later and bore on his smiling face the triumph of diplomatic success.

The girls met him at the depot, delighted.

"It's all settled," said he. "All your father has to do, Ruth, is to deliver himself up to the marshal, when he will be released on parole and no further trouble given him."

"How can we ever thank you?" said Ruth tearfully, for her anxiety had been very severe.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Florian. "It was none of my doing. The governor was only too glad to hear my proposition, and there was no diplomacy required. I had dinner with him afterwards and found out the true inwardness of the whole matter."

"I should have been there," said Linda. "I do so want to dine with a governor! What a place this is—not a distinguished man in it!"

"It's the next best thing to dine with one who has dined with a governor," Florian replied. "But I met one who goes ahead of governors; one whose handshake and very polite attentions and compliments I shall never forget—no less a person than Andrew Jackson."

"Oh!" cried both girls, drawing their breath with delight and taking another look at the hero to catch some expiring rays of the glory that had lately shone upon him.

"And what did he say to you?" asked Linda.

"So many things that it will take some time to relate them. When we have had dinner and I am rested a little you shall hear every word."

They proceeded to the house, laughing and talking, and were unfortunately enough to meet Sara and Mr. Buck just setting out for a morning walk. The situation was painful for some of the parties. Sara flushed and paled. But Mr. Buck was unconscious of any guilt and greeted Florian politely. Florian himself showed no feeling in the matter.

"If you will be so kind as to excuse Sara," he said to the gentleman, "I shall be much obliged to you."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Wallace. I hope you enjoyed your visit to New York. Good-morning!"

And lifting his hat elaborately, he went on his way, comforted by a glance of Linda's dark eyes. Sara bounced indignantly into the house without paying further attention to the party.

Mrs. Winifred hastened away to prepare an early dinner, and Florian began a graphic description of the metropolis, choosing his words carefully, showing none of the enthusiasm he really felt, for he was well aware that the girls were looking for an exhibition of that kind. They left him when the recital was ended, and on the veranda compared notes.

"He doesn't seem to be much taken up with the city," said Linda.

"But you can't be sure of him," said Ruth. "Perhaps he knows we looked for some sign, and was careful to conceal it. In a few days, when our anxiety is gone, he will rave of New York, and then—"

"Then we shall lose him directly," said Linda. "I'm beginning not to care. There is one thing almost certain: while you waver, and Sara is attached to Mr. Buck, he will not go and by the time spring comes who knows what will happen?"

"Who knows what will happen?" repeated Ruth. "You are right. Who knows?" And she rose to go.

"You will stay for dinner, Ruth?"

"No; I must get ready for our visit to the island this afternoon. My father must be at home to-night. Very likely Florian will accompany me, and you might—"

"Two's company," said Linda, "but I'll go, nevertheless. Look there," she added suddenly, pointing through the vines in the direction of the garden. Ruth, looking, saw Florian pacing the gravelled walk abstractedly.



his head bowed, his hands clasped behind him.

"He hasn't done that in an age," she said. "He is troubled, and New York is the trouble. O Ruth!"

"I thought you were beginning not to care," said Ruth, as the tears glistened in Linda's eyes.

"Only beginning," answered Linda; "and really I don't care." So she laughed the next minute.

Florian, still pacing, was called into the sitting-room by his mother. Mrs. Winifred was full of anxiety with regard to many things, but never found it necessary to make any parade of her feelings before her family.

"Seemingly, dear," she said to Florian, who was most patient with her, "we're going to have trouble in various ways, and I was wondering if you noticed anything."

"Did you notice anything, mother?" said Florian.

"Well, I can't say that I did, but it's hard sometimes to decide. Now, there's Linda—"

"Linda?" said Florian, smiling. "I wasn't aware there was anything the matter with her."

"No, to be sure not," said she, abashed that no other had found anything amiss with Linda; "but seemingly, Florian, she doesn't eat much, and she grows thin and white every day; but, of course, I'm wrong."

"No, you're not, mother," said Florian, jumping up. "I did take notice, not so very long ago, either. What a fool I am always thinking more of myself than others."

"Then Sara," began Mrs. Winifred with more hesitation—"I don't know. I'm not sure, but seemingly she's quite indifferent to her religion lately. I may be wrong—"

"No, no," said Florian; "but that is a gentle way of saying a very serious thing, mother. Go on; you're not wrong."

"She has a great liking for Mr. Buck, seemingly; of course I wouldn't say that she had, but her actions—And then if your father saw anything wrong he would be put out."

"I should think so," said Florian; "and Sara would be locked up, as she must be, I fear, before this unhappy affair is ended. She hasn't enough mind to know what religion is, and I fear—I fear—"

He passed into a moody meditation without finishing the sentence, and tapped the table with his fingers. A sob aroused him. Mrs. Winifred was weeping, and was plainly ashamed of herself for her action.

"Well, I don't think the matter requires—"

"I know it," said she, "but then I couldn't help thinking of her being a minister's wife, seemingly."

"Time, time," said Florian—"give me time and I'll move Mr. Buck in another direction. He is afflicted with the desire of converting us all, Pere Rougevin included. Was the pere here to see us? Does he know of the matter?"

"No," said Mrs. Winifred.

"I must tell him, then. He is good at devising sharp manoeuvres. Perhaps he will think of something. But now Linda must be looked after. If we lost that flower—"

He went out to hunt her up, without finishing a sentence whose import he did not realize, while he thought of it. Linda was eating grapes in the garden.

"That looks well," thought Florian, and called her to the veranda.

"You are to come with me this afternoon," said he, "and make one

of the squire's triumphal procession homeward. Here, what's this? You are too pale. And why does your dress fit so loosely, miss? I noticed it a week ago, and to-day I notice it still more."

"I never fatten till winter," said she soberly; "and then I am thinking a good deal lately."

"Sleeping, you mean. What about?"

"About your visit to New York, Florian," she said, holding up some grape-leaves to shade her face. "You needn't hide it. I know you're more than ever determined on going there, and I was thinking how I should amuse myself when you were gone."

"I won't deny your assertion, Linda, but my going is far off. There are too many obstacles in the way."

"I know them, and I feel wicked enough to wish they would stay in your way a long time. What nonsense," she added, "to borrow trouble! While Ruth wavers and Sara is under Mr. Buck's spells we shall not lose you."

"You remind me of my chains," he said smilingly to hide his real annoyance. "And there is another more binding than they."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"I won't tell you, Be content that while Ruth wavers and Sara affects Mr. Buck I shall remain—and then longer, perhaps," he said, sighing, and went into the house.

Linda remained looking and thinking at random, and questioning why those things should be. In a few months the most perfect object of the perfect scene would make part of it no longer. That sun and sky above her; those marvellous islands, whose perfumes the fresh winds fanned to the shore; that water whose beauty was beyond that of jewels: the quaint town, so old and so clean and so loved, its white-headed and dark-headed people, its green foliage and autumn fruits, its bells and sweet and harsh noises; the stars that sprinkled the river firmament as well as that of heaven; the ghostly moon, the white-winged boats, and a thousand other loved, familiar things, would all be just as they were to-day and last night, but her brother would be gone. Nay, there was a time when she herself would make no part of the scene, and yet the glories of it would remain; never eyes would gaze upon it and see, perhaps, all that remained of her—a white stone in the graveyard, and a name. How could that little world of which she was the centre ever get along without her? Would it not be strange to feel that Linda Wallace lay out of sight in the earth, and children played thoughtlessly on her grave, and no one spoke of her more? She began almost unconsciously to weep.

"This is all there is of earth," said she, "and one might as well live in a desert. Heaven is the only thing worth striving for; and as for our memory, even a stone is too much and a name and a grave. I shall have no grave or stone. Only heaven and a place in God's memory for me."

"A correct sentiment," said Florian. "Dry your tears and come in to dinner. Your liver is plainly out of order when you become so religious."

She laughed and went in with him, and was gay enough for the rest of the day until the boat was fitted out and the three were sailing to Solitary Island. The wind was quite fresh at three o'clock in the afternoon, but not too much so until they entered Eel Bay. There some caution was required up to the very landing place in front of the hermit's dwelling, for the wind blew straight down the channel. It was very awkward of Florian that he should have thrown his hat in the air as the hermit and the squire both came to the door together. He was so vain of his good news!

"Look out, boy!" said Scott and the squire together.

To be Continued.

**USED MEN AT THE OFFICE UP AND TIRED OUT**

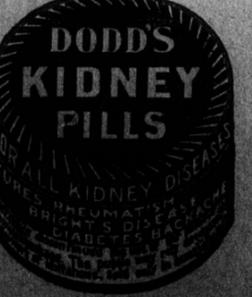
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