

some young photographer, this thin pale-faced girl, who was so shy and retiring, and yet who never blushed; loved him with a love which could not exactly be called hopeless, because no element of hope had ever entered into the composition of it. Hannah Brackenridge had too much cold good sense to dream, even in her wildest moments, that John English would ever seek to woo and win such a one as herself. She loved him prepositionally—with an *if*. If she had been very handsome, and very rich, and very accomplished, she would have striven to lure this wild hawk to her side, and put her jesses round him, and hold him as her own for ever. But being none of these things, being only a poor pale-faced girl, with scarcely a word to say for herself in the presence of strangers, she was fain to cherish her little dream of love as a flower on which no sun would ever shine. Mrs. Jakeway and she were very friendly, and a day seldom passed without the chemist's sister paying one or more visits to Cliff Cottage; and thus it was that she made the acquaintance of John, who had always a smile and a pleasant word for the shy, quiet girl, who was so different in every way from her blustering, loud-voiced brother.

Mr. Brackenridge was quite as glad to get about again, and look after the interests of his business, as his sister was to be relieved from further attendance on him as an invalid. There was no inhabitant of Normanford who talked, and surmised, and wondered more about the attempted burglary at Cliff Cottage, than the gossip-loving chemist, who had a long talk respecting it with the head-constable of the little town on the very day of his recovery; and who examined with much interest the bunch of skeleton keys which had been picked up in Mr. English's room, and which, it was hoped, would ultimately lead to the discovery of the offender. The affair had been a source of considerable excitement in so small a place, and when Mr. Brackenridge declared in open conclave in the smoke-room of the *Hand and Dagger*, that he had heard a pistol-shot on the night in question, but had been too lazy to get out of bed and inquire into the cause of it, he became quite an authority in the matter, and was taken by the button on the following morning, and treated to two 'sherris' and three 'bitters' by certain friends who had not been so fortunate as to hear his narrative of the previous evening. It was a fortunate thing, everybody declared, that Mr. English was not in the habit of keeping money or other valuables in his writing-desk; and that beyond having his desk broken open, and his letters and papers tossed about, no harm had been done. The head-constable gave it as his opinion, to a small circle of private friends, that the whole affair bore the mark of a practised London hand, and that before the winter was over they would probably hear of other attempts, no great distance away. A shudder ran through Normanford at these tidings, the inhabitants of which became all at once very particular in looking after the fastenings of their doors and windows, those people being, as a rule, the most careful in that respect who had the least to lose. Mrs. Jakeway had a famous time of it, you may be sure. She had no less than eighteen invitations to tea at different houses in the course of the four weeks following the attack; and a little china shepherdess, which had been broken by the fall of the whatnot, was looked upon with much interest wherever she went. But days and weeks passed away without affording any clue to the perpetrator of the offence, and the topic was gradually worn threadbare by much discussion, and fell silently into the background, yielding place to the more immediate interests of the day.

As before stated, Normanford was six miles from any railway; but a rude two-horse omnibus, built for travelling over heavy country roads, ran twice a day to Duke's Hill Station, eight miles away, to meet the morning and evening mail trains. John English having certain business to transact at the other end of the county, started one bright frosty morning by the nine o'clock 'bus from Normanford. About a mile out of the town, they stopped to take up a pas-

senger, who mounted to the roof, and took the vacant seat next John, and proved to be none other than Mr. Brackenridge, the chemist, also on his way to the station at Duke's Hill. The two men greeted each other with a hearty good-morning: to any one not absolutely his enemy, John English would have done no less. He disliked Brackenridge, and would have gone half a mile out of his way any day to avoid his company, and yet he had not been able altogether to shirk the intimacy which the other was so evidently desirous of forcing upon him; for it not unfrequently happened that in going to or returning from the town to his lodgings, he would be overtaken by Brackenridge, who always accommodated his pace to that of John for the remainder of the way; and unless a man is an absolute bear, he must in such a case speak when he is spoken to, even though his replies be confined to monosyllables. Then, again, John had been indebted to the chemist for finding him a trustworthy man to carry his apparatus, when photographing, about the country. There was a further bond of union between them—the bond which unites two men who are smokers, and capable of appreciating a good cigar. On two occasions, the chemist had sent Hannah into Cliff Cottage, with his compliments, and would Mr. English oblige him by accepting a dozen weeds of a choice brand? and when your next-door neighbour does that, what can you do but accept the favour with thanks? So, on the present occasion, John and Brackenridge, sitting side by side on the top of the 'bus, entered into conversation readily and at once.

Normanford lies in a valley, as does also, despite its name, the station at Duke's Hill. The hill itself is about a mile away to the north, and must be crossed by a road, which winds right over its summit, before the railway can be reached. From the highest point of this road, there is one of the finest views in all Monkshire; and here the 'bus always halts for three minutes, for the double purpose of breathing the horses, and giving the passengers time to admire the extensive prospect. From one particular spot a glimpse of the sea can be obtained over a break in the ridge of intervening downs, and this view was pointed out by Brackenridge to John. The sky was so unclouded this morning, and the atmosphere so clear and free from haze, that the distant line where sky and sea met was barely distinguishable.

"What is the name of that little island out there to the east?" said John. "I have seen it several times in my rambles along the shore, but have never learned its name."

"That is the isle of Inchmallow," said the chemist. "It lies three miles from the mainland. You have never visited it, I suppose?"

"Certainly not," said John. "Why should I?"

"For no reason that I know of, except that it can boast some interesting ruins, and you have a taste that way, I understand."

"What are the ruins you speak of?"

"Those of the Hermitage of St. Bertram."

"And, pray, who was St. Bertram?"

"Oh, one of those old Romish fellows who lived a tremendous while ago. He pretended that he saw visions; and he went and lived out on the island all by himself, a sort of half-and-half Crusoe, but without a Man Friday to bear him company."

"But how did he obtain his food so far from the mainland?"

"Oh, by cultivating a patch of ground, I suppose; and by the offerings of pious folk who went out to him in boats. He lived in a hole hollowed out of the rock; and when he died, they made a saint of him, and built what they called a Hermitage over his cave, where a certain number of monks from the old abbey just beyond Eastringham used to go and reside turn and turn about. But the Hermitage is in ruins, and has been for centuries; only people say that the arch of the great window, and one or two other bits that are left, are as fine specimens of that sort of thing as you will find in a day's ramble; but, for my own part, I know nothing of architecture."

"I must visit the little island," said John,

"and see whether the ruins are worth sketching. What means of access are there to it?"

"Only name the day you would like to go," said the chemist warmly, "and there shall be as neat a little boat at your service as you will find within a dozen miles, together with a man to pull you there and back again."

John, who had no desire to lay himself under further obligations to the chemist, would fain have declined the offer thus pressed upon him; but Brackenridge seemed so earnest in the matter, that after doing his best to back out of it, he was obliged to yield a reluctant consent.

"If convenient, you had better name an early day for your visit," said Brackenridge. "This fine weather may not last much longer."

"To-day is Tuesday," said John. "I shall be disengaged on Friday, if that day will suit you, and the weather prove favourable."

"Friday let it be," said the chemist, as he made a note in his pocket-book. "A man and boat shall be waiting for you at 10.30 a.m., at Finger Bay, rather an out-of-the-way place, by the by.—Oh, you know it, do you? Then that's all right.—And now, here we are at the station."

When Mr. Brackenridge reached home that evening, his first words to his sister were: "Send down to the *Hand and Dagger*, and tell Jerry Winch I want to see him."

"Jerry is here, waiting for you," said Hannah.

"What brings him here, I wonder? But send him in, and leave us together."

Brackenridge and Jerry were very good friends; indeed, it was through a well-simulated liking for the son that the chemist had won his first step in the affections of the mother. Jerry looked up to Brackenridge as to a man of unlimited knowledge, who wielded the power of life and death in the shape of terrible drugs; and who could, if he were so minded, cause any one who offended him to wither away and die in some mysterious manner.

He came slouching in, in his usual shamefaced way, twirling his hat between his fingers, and seated himself on the extreme edge of a chair, in obedience to the chemist's bidding. Brackenridge had studied Jerry's peculiarities, and waited till the lad had swallowed a cup of tea, and devoured a couple of muffins, before asking him a single question.

"Well, Jerry, my man, and what has brought you up here?" he said at last, as the lad proceeded to rub his sleeve across his mouth.

"Pipanta is ill, and Jerry wants a charm to make her better."

"What is the matter with her ladyship?" asked the chemist.

"She refuses to eat; she refuses to dance when her lord plays sweet music; she is no longer glad, but very, very melancholy."

The chemist turned from the table, and sat staring into the fire for a full quarter of an hour, without speaking, Jerry meanwhile sitting patiently twirling his hat, but with a furtive eye on the plate of muffins, momentarily growing colder on the table.

"Jerry," said the chemist, turning round at last, and speaking in a solemn voice, "Pipanta is not ill—she is enchanted!"

A low cry escaped from Jerry; he half started up in his chair, and then sat down again, trembling violently.

"Yes, enchanted, cursed by a magic spell," repeated Brackenridge. "Katafango, the great magician, has cast an evil eye upon her. Pipanta will never recover, unless"—The chemist paused and looked earnestly at his half-witted companion; but Jerry had not sufficient sense to fill up the hiatus with the question which would have come naturally to the lips of any one else, and Brackenridge waited in vain. "Unless," he resumed slowly and impressively—"unless Katafango, the great magician, were to die. In that case, Pipanta would certainly recover."

"Oh, tell me," cried Jerry, starting up, "where does this great magician live? Jerry will go to him, and will pray him on his knees to spare the life of his lovely Pipanta."

The chemist laughed a loud, scornful laugh, "You don't know what you would ask, my poor lad," he said. "Katafango is king of the Toads;