

Mark's memory still dwelt kindly on the pale-faced Hannah, a fact which was well known to her; and it was to Mark that she now looked for assistance in carrying out her scheme. On reaching Merton, she found that Mark had gone out for the day, and would not be home till a late hour; but whatever the hour might be, she must wait and see him. She left the old farmer and his wife, who knew nothing of her real errand, at her usual hour for returning home; and then walking out for a couple of miles along the road by which she knew that Mark must reach Merton, she waited at a little tavern, hour after hour, listening for the sound of his horse's hoofs. It was past ten o'clock before he came; and in half an hour from that time Hannah was rowing across to Inchmallow in her lover's boat. She had resolutely refused either to let Mark accompany her, or to tell him whither she was going; only he was to meet her at a certain time at a certain spot, and take the boat back to Merton. Hannah's father had been keeper of one of the northern light-houses, and the girl was thoroughly at home in the management of a boat. How she succeeded in rescuing John English from the fate which at one time seemed so imminent, we have already seen.

John hired a chaise, and reached home the following afternoon, frightening Mrs. Jakeway exceedingly with the sight of his worn white face. He kept his promise to his mysterious preserver; and was impervious to all Mrs. Jakeway's hints and half-questions as to where he had been, and what had happened to him, to change him so wofully in so short a time. All he could be induced to say was, that he had been taken suddenly ill during the time he was away, but that he was better now. Naturally enough, he was greatly perplexed in his own mind as to the identity of his rescuer: that he owed his life to the chemist's sister was a fact of which he had not the remotest suspicion.

Brackenridge, coming home at the end of eight days from his first departure, and being informed by his sister that Mr. English had been severely ill, hurried at once into Cliff Cottage, without waiting to take off his travelling-things, to offer his condolences. He was surprised—he was astounded—he didn't know whether he was standing on his head or his heels, when John told him what had befallen himself at Inchmallow. The whole thing was almost too incredible for belief, said the chemist. Jerry Winch had been employed for years to take parties to the island, and had been a favourite with everybody. What had put the idea into his foolish head to play off such a dangerous trick on Mr. English, was utterly beyond his, Brackenridge's, power even faintly to imagine; but one thing he would take care of, that Jerry should never in future be allowed to officiate as guide to the island. But what did Mr. English intend to do in the matter? Did he intend to institute proceedings against the simpleton?—No! Well, that was noble, that was generous; and he must be allowed to say that it was wise also. Jerry's friends must be careful that no similar responsibility should ever be allowed to rest on him in future. But how did Mr. English succeed in escaping from the island? That was a point which he, Brackenridge, was much interested in ascertaining.

But John, bearing in mind the promise he had given, positively declined to enlighten the chemist on that point; and Brackenridge was obliged to return home with his curiosity unsatisfied. He was gloomy and preoccupied all evening; and about eleven o'clock he set out for the *Hund and Dagger*, entering it by a back-way which he made use of when he did not wish to be seen by the ordinary customers of the hotel; and Mrs. Winch and he had a long interview together in the private room of the landlady. The method of John English's escape from the island lay heavily on the minds of both of them: it was unknown, and must therefore, they felt, be to some extent dangerous to their peculiar interests. The chemist's diabolical plan had miscarried, though how or why, neither the landlady nor her companion could so much as guess. The promised three hundred pounds were still as far as ever from the fingers that itched to grasp them; and the widow was still as determined as ever

that her wedding-day should be postponed till the obstacle which stood so persistently in the path of Lady Spencelaugh and herself should be finally disposed of. Once more Brackenridge exerted all his persuasive powers in an effort to induce the widow to reveal to him the nature of the secret which bound her so firmly to the interests of the mistress of Belair; and once more all his cajoleries proved in vain, and he had to return home baffled and enraged, and only withheld from throwing up the whole business by the golden lure which shone so temptingly before his mind's eye.

Jerry Winch had been missing from his usual haunts for several days, and many people wondered what had become of the obliging simpleton; but Jerry was in hiding, and no one in the little town, save his mother and Brackenridge, knew the place of his retreat, which was at a little farmhouse about a dozen miles from Normanford, kept by a cousin of Mrs. Winch. On the forenoon of the day following that of his interview with the landlady, Brackenridge borrowed a horse and gig belonging to one of his friends, and set off to see Jerry. The lad was out, a servant told him, when he reached the house, adding that Jerry would most likely be found at the clearing in the fir plantation; and there Brackenridge did find him, stealing on him unawares, and watching him in silence for several minutes before making his presence known. Jerry was singularly employed. At one end of a small clearing in the gloomy plantation, he had fixed up two forked sticks about five feet in height, with a third stick fastened across them. To this cross-bar a piece of string was knotted, the other end of which was firmly tied to the leg of a miserable sparrow. Jerry, standing a few spaces away with a loaded pistol in his hand, waited till the bird, tired with its ineffectual efforts to escape, perched on the cross-bar, and the moment that it did so, he took aim and fired. If unsuccessful in hitting it, he waited patiently till the fluttering creature perched once more, and then fired again; and so on, till he either succeeded in killing it, or else cut the string with his bullet, and so allowed it to escape. On a branch close by hung a wicker-cage containing a dozen or more sparrows, all destined for a similar fate. As often as Jerry succeeded in killing a bird, he burst into a wild fit of laughter, that bent him double, and shook him violently, as though he were being clutched at by invisible demoniac fingers.

"He seems made on purpose to do the Fiend's own bidding," muttered Brackenridge to himself, as he stepped into the opening.—"Well, Jerry, my man," he said aloud, "how are you to-day? That's a pretty plaything you have got there,"—pointing to the pistol.

"Yes," said the lad with a grave nod of the head; "it's Jerry's new toy. Rare fun to shoot sparrows! Poor beggars! how they try to get away, don't they?"

"But how came you to obtain such a toy?"

"It was in Milcham's window for sale for a long time, and Jerry never saw it without longing to have it. So he saved up all his shillings and sixpences till he had got enough money to buy it, and then he gave old drunken Steve Benson a shilling to go and get it for him. Hoo, hoo, hoo! Rare fun to shoot sparrows! Watch and see how nicely Jerry can knock one off its perch."

"Not now, thank you, Jerry—some day when I have more time. I want to talk to you about something else to-day. By the by, how is Pipanta?"

"Alas! the lovely Pipanta is dead," said Jerry, in a tone of anguish as his arms fell dejectedly by his side, and the tears came into his large blue eyes.

"Dead!" exclaimed the chemist in a sympathetic voice. "When did she die?"

"This day-week," said the lad sadly. "And Jerry buried her at midnight, when the moon was at full, under the Witches' Oak on Pensdale Moor. Oh! my lovely Pipanta! Never will thy master see thee more; never more will thy beautiful head nestle in his bosom; never more, ah me! wilt thou dance to thy lord's music. Jerry has lost his darling for ever!"

"Died this day-week, did she?" said Brackenridge musingly. Let me consider. Why, that was the very day that Katafango escaped from Inchmallow!"

"Escaped! Has the great magician escaped?" exclaimed the terrified Jerry. "Then he will kill poor Jerry, or perhaps cast a spell over him, and turn him into a snake or a toad. Put some of the white powder into his drink!"

The chemist smiled, and stroked the lad's hair. "Jerry has no cause to be afraid," he said; "the charm which his friend gave him will keep him safe against the arts of all the magicians in the world. No, no, my poor lad; Katafango can do no harm to you; but had he not escaped, Pipanta would not have died; but now he will take her soul, and put it into the body of a toad, and so imprison it for ever. And the turn of Mogaddo will come next."

"No, no," screamed the boy; "Mogaddo shall not die!" Then in an intense whisper, and with his lips close to the chemist's ear, he said: "Let Jerry kill Katafango!"

"Tut, tut! my dear-boy, what are you talking about?" said the chemist pleasantly. "But put that pretty toy in your pocket, and link your arm in mine, and let us walk together to the top of the hill, and consider what means we shall adopt to save the life of your pet, Mogaddo."

Two days later, the county carrier, returning home from Fairwood market in the dusk of the winter afternoon, found the bleeding and insensible body of a man lying in the road; and being a strong fellow, he contrived to lift it into his cart, and so drove with it to the nearest house, which, as it happened, was that of the station-master of Kingsthorpe Station. And so, without any exercise of their own will in the matter, John English and Jane Garrod were at last brought face to face, and another link in the chain was complete.

CHAPTER XXVI.—JOHN AND HIS NURSE.

John English lifted his languid eyelids, and gazed feebly around. He was in a strange room, and there was a strange face at his bedside—a strange face, but not an unkind one. "Where am I? and who are you?" he asked in a weak voice.

"You are in the house of Abel Garrod, the station-master at Kingsthorpe; and I am Abel Garrod's wife."

"How did I come here? and what has happened to me?"

"You are not to talk—the doctor has forbidden it. But I will answer your questions, just to satisfy your mind; and then you must try to go to sleep, and I will tell you everything when you are stronger. You were found on the road, yesterday afternoon, about a mile from here, and brought to this house. You had been shot through the shoulder, and had lost a great deal of blood. The ball has been extracted; but the wound is a dangerous one, and you will be confined to your bed for some time to come. One question I should like you to answer me: Did you see the man who shot you, or have you any idea who he was?"

"Let me think," said John. Then after a pause: "I remember everything now. I had set off to go up to Belair with a portfolio of photographs; and had just left the meadows for the high-road, and was passing the clump of larches, when I heard a rustling behind me, and next moment a shot, and then I felt that I was hit. I turned, and saw the dusky outline of a figure hurrying stealthily through the brushwood, and made an attempt to pursue it; but in a moment or two, the ground seemed to reel under my feet, and then all was darkness. Why I was shot, or by whom I was shot, I know no more, than you do."

"Not another word," said Jane Garrod. "You have talked far more already than you have strength for."

"My portfolio—has it been found?" said John anxiously, without noticing Jane's injunction.

"It was picked up near you, and lies on that table."

"Then pray oblige me by having it sent up to Miss Spencelaugh at Belair, with a message