

done if he'd known that Miss Selby was there in that room all the time?"

"I wonder!" echoed her companion.

CHAPTER X

FACE TO FACE

WHEN Vernon Shapland reached the street he found the man with the miniature talking to the taxi-driver, and realizing that it would not be easy to discuss a delicate matter in the open street, he proposed they should run into the city.

"Shall we go to my club in Piccadilly?" he asked. "We shall be quiet there at this hour, and it will be possible to talk without interruption."

"Don't mind if I do," answered Rowley. "These streets are frightfully noisy after the New Guinea bush."

Vernon Shapland was not startled by the other's revelation of the place he came from. From the moment his eyes had fallen on the miniature, and he had learned who was in possession of it, he had been sure that he came from Papua. As they settled themselves in the taxi he exhibited no more than a polite interest in his companion, though in reality he was in a raging fever of curiosity.

"You are a stranger in London, then?"

"Never set foot in it till three hours or so ago. I've lived all my life in the Pacific, knocking about the islands, pearling and gem-hunting, prospecting, and what not."

Vernon Shapland betrayed a quickened interest.

"The Pacific must be an interesting place," he said, "and from all one has read of it, life there must be pretty exciting."

"Depends where you go," answered Rowley smilingly. "There are islands where you can loaf and loll about better than anywhere in the world—'a drowsy land where it is always afternoon,' as Tennyson says. But there are others, the Solomon Group, for instance—'the fighting Solomons,' you know—where you can have as exciting a life as you want. The man who has a plantation down there has to look lively all the time, and he needs an arsenal to keep the plantation kanakas and the islanders quiet."

"Indeed!" said Shapland politely. "I did not know there were such savage places left on the earth. One always associates the Pacific islands with missionaries and the late R. L. Stevenson. But you mentioned New Guinea just now? Am I to understand you have been living there?"

"Yes," answered the other unsuspectingly. "I've put seven years in there."

"And is it as lawless a place as the Solomon Group?"

"Depends where you go. Things have altered a lot during the last few years, under the British administration. Round the settlements and on most of the plantations up the Astrolabe you're as safe as in London—safer if you take the motor-cars here into account. But inland and up among the hills there are cannibals, and head-hunting tribes, not to mention prospectors who don't care a fig for anything but gold and gems."

"How very interesting!" said Shapland. "But here we are at the club."

They descended from the taxi, and as they en-

tered the portals of one of the most exclusive clubs in London, Shapland turned:

"I forgot to inquire your name," he said. "It is necessary that I should know it that I may enter it in the visitors' book."

"Rowley," answered the other simply.

This time Vernon Shapland was startled. It was the very last name he was expecting, and for a moment fear had him in his grip. He hesitated a moment, then turned to ask for the Christian name; but was afraid to do so, and as he bent over the visitors' book his face was pale, and his hand shook as he wrote the name which for him had such significant memories.

Without speaking, he led the way to a quiet smoke-room, and immediately ordered refreshment, and when it arrived drank off his own brandy and soda, and ordered a second. The pallor of his face was noticeable, and without having any inkling of the cause of it, Rowley remarked it.

"You don't look very well, Mr. Shapland."

Shapland smiled feebly, and lied easily.

"It is my heart. A touch of weakness, nothing more. I came too quickly up the stairs, but I shall be right in a moment or two."

As a matter of fact the visitor's name had been a great shock to him, and his heart was pounding with fear, whilst questions raced through his mind at the gallop. Who was the man? What relation was he to that dead man in far Papua? What was he doing here in London? What——? He saw the other watching him in surprise, and with a great effort controlled himself; and after a moment he offered his cigarette case to Rowley, lit one himself, and leaned back in his chair. As the brandy asserted itself his nerves steadied themselves, and

the colour came back into his cheeks. He leaned forward once more.

"That miniature, Mr.—er—Rowley," he said, holding out his hand. "May I look at it again?"

Mr. Rowley nodded, and producing the locket, handed it to Shapland. The latter looked at it quite a long time, without speaking. He was wondering how to learn the circumstances in which it had been found, and how much this man with the significant name knew of that tragedy in the camp in the Papuan mountains. Finally he said thoughtfully as if to himself rather than to his companion: "It is like her, very like, and yet there are differences."

"You know the original, Mr. Shapland?" asked Rowley eagerly.

Shapland shook his head. "In the first glance I thought I did; but I see now that I was mistaken. There is a very strong resemblance to a lady of my acquaintance, but that is all. It is not a portrait of the lady whom I know."

Watching, he saw a disappointed look come on Rowley's face, a look that passed as Rowley spoke.

"Are you quite sure, Mr. Shapland? If the resemblance is so striking, may it not be some defect in the miniature which accounts for the apparent difference of identity?"

Shapland smiled easily. "It is as well that Signor Crispi did not hear you make that suggestion. There are no defects in Crispi's miniatures. In his own particular line he is a genius and the most accomplished artist in London. That is why, in view of the differences that exist, I am so sure that the lady of the miniature is not the lady of my acquaintance." He broke off, and then added:

"By the by, I suppose there is no doubt that

this is a Crispi miniature? Seeing you in the studio made me jump to that conclusion."

None whatever," answered Rowley. "His name is on the back."

"Um! Then that settles it," answered Shapland, returning the locket. "I am afraid I shall not be of any use to you, after all. Crispi's work, as I have said, is so perfect that it leaves no room for mistake."

But Charles Rowley was not so easily turned aside.

"I should like to judge for myself, Mr. Shapland, for the identity of the lady of the miniature is very important to me—much more important than I can tell you or any one else. Couldn't you introduce me to the lady and let me——"

"That is quite impossible, Mr. Rowley," answered Shapland with sudden hauteur. "I do not know what may prevail in New Guinea, but in England it is not customary for gentlemen to introduce their lady friends to—er—pardon me—come-by-chance acquaintances."

Charles Rowley was conscious of the snub, and flushed a little under it, then he laughed.

"I can get along without the introduction, Mr. Shapland. It will be sufficient if you will tell me where I can see the lady—just see her—in that way I shall be able to satisfy myself."

"That also is impossible," answered Shapland with a quick lie. "The lady of whom I was thinking is at the present time travelling abroad. I am afraid that you would have to rake Europe through—and possibly Egypt—before you could find her."

"I'll rake the world but I'll find her!" cried Rowley vehemently.

Vernon Shapland betrayed a mild surprise, and then smiled as he answered:

"That would take a long time, Mr. Rowley, and life is short. But you must have a very powerful motive for desiring to find a lady, whom you have never seen? How did you come to be in possession of her portrait? Did you purchase it from some dealer or——"

"I found it in very tragic circumstances," interrupted the other. "And that is one reason why I wished to find the lady."

Vernon Shapland showed no curiosity in regard to the circumstances mentioned. He would have liked to make an inquiry, but was afraid of betraying himself by some slip, so instead he remarked

"One reason, Mr. Rowley, then you have more than one."

He saw Rowley glance at the open locket in his hand, and caught the light in his eyes. Then he smiled to himself as the other replied:

"Yes, but it is a private one."

Shapland ostentatiously took out his watch and consulted it, then he rose from his chair.

"You will have to excuse me, Mr. Rowley. I have an engagement. I am sorry not to have been able to help you, but if you are open to receive a word of advice, I should drop worrying over the lady of the miniature. After all, it may chance to be a fancy study, and in any case the world is a very big place, and chance resemblances among humans are common enough."

"I've got to find her," said Rowley with conviction, a stubborn look coming on the bronzed face. "I shall go back to Crispi's. He will know whether it's a fancy picture or not, and if it isn't, he will be able to give me the young lady's name."

"You will waste your time," said Shapland with an assumed air of conviction.

"I've time to burn on this job," was the reply, given with unquestionable earnestness.

"Well, of course, you will do as you please, Mr. Rowley," answered Shapland easily, accompanying his visitor to the door.

He watched him hail a taxi, and as the vehicle lost itself in the stream of Piccadilly, he turned and went inside to a telephone, with a very strained look on his face. There, after consulting a directory, he gave a number, and a moment later inquired "Is that Crispi's?"

"Yes!" came the reply.

"Then just ask Johnson to come to the telephone. I want to speak to him rather urgently."

After a little time a new voice sounded, and then he spoke at some length; and when he put down the instrument his face had a less tense look.

"That will scotch him for the present!" he whispered hoarsely, as he made his way again to the smoke-room. There he ordered a third brandy, gulped it down almost neat, then throwing himself in a chair, lit a cigarette and surrendered himself to the black surge of thought in his mind.

"In God's name, who is the man?" So his thoughts ran. "Rowley! Rowley! Can I have made a mistake?" At that question a very paroxysm of fear convulsed his face, and for a little time he was too agitated to continue his meditation. But presently he grew calmer, and his thoughts began to flow connectedly. "I shall have to find out things—who he is first of all! I know what he is after. The fact that he has the locket and is plainly following it up as a clue reveals that! What a lucky thing that Janet and he did not meet! That was a near shave at Crispi's. If I had not happened to have gone to the studio with Janet——" He

broke off the thought there, and a new one leaped in its place. "After all, Crispi will be hard to get at; and in any case he knows nothing whatever about the miniature. He will recognize Janet—he can't help doing that, he may even guess who painted it, but it will be no more than a guess, and guesses are not evidence! But I shall have to go warily. . . . If only I could get possession of that locket! . . . I wished I had asked for his address. But—by Jove, yes! there is a way! It's not too late yet. Johnson may be able to get hold of it."

He hurried back to the telephone, gave the necessary instruction to Johnson, and then returning to the smoke-room, stood looking out of the window with a thoughtful expression on his face. It would perhaps have been still more thoughtful had he at that moment been able to see the man who had so recently left him.

The taxi, in which Rowley had departed with the intention of returning to Signor Crispi's studio, was held up at a cross-roads, and he was looking idly out of the window when his eyes encountered those of a young lady in a taxi going the same way. Instantly he recognized her. She was the lady whom he was seeking—the lady of the miniature. For a moment he was too astonished for action, then he rapped sharply on the window to attract her attention, and gave a violent tug at the strap. It came off in his hand, and before he could open the window, the other vehicle moved forward, the passenger's face betraying astonishment at his antics.