

## CHAPTER XII

## AT LADY NANCARROW'S

LADY NANCARROW, the wife of Sir James Nancarrow, was one of the most popular hostesses in London. Her husband was a Cornish baronet, who on leaving Oxford had gone into the City with the intention of restoring the family fortune, and being a man of resource and character had succeeded beyond all his anticipations. In addition to his great place in the financial world, he had a seat in the House of Commons, and his wife often entertained for the party to which he was attached; and as she was always on the watch for the latest lion, her parties were at least interesting.

Just now she was calling on Mrs. Selby and her daughter Janet, who having recovered from the shock of the fire had established themselves in a flat borrowed from a friend.

"I did not know you were in London," she explained, "until Jimmy met Mr. Selby this morning. You seem to have had some exciting moments at the burning of the *Murland Hotel*. Janet, I hear, had a quite narrow escape. Who was the hero who saved her so gallantly?"

"We do not know," explained Mrs. Selby. "We lost sight of him when we were whirled off to the *Hartington*, and he was a complete stranger to us."

"How romantic!" laughed Lady Nancarrow. "Was he young?"

"I never noticed," answered Mrs. Selby. "I was too alarmed and upset."

Lady Nancarrow looked at Janet smilingly. "Was he, Janet? You ought to know."

Janet smiled back. "Yes, he was! And handsome too!"

"I thought you would know," laughed the baronet's wife. "You can always trust a girl to notice those things." Then she shook her head playfully. "If it were not for Vernon Shapland and the trousseau that you are buying I should say that there was a distinct danger of the adventure developing on the lines of a circulating library novel. But things being as they are that painful contingency is ruled out."

She laughed once more, and then explained. "I came along this morning, because I am giving a dance to-morrow night, and I want you both to come. You must not say no. Vernon has already promised, and, besides, I have secured the very latest thing in millionaires—a protégé of Sir James's from New Guinea, young, handsome, and delightfully unconventional. He dined with us last night and to hear him talk of New Guinea was like reading a Rider Haggard novel. He seems to have been on quite friendly terms with cannibals, head hunters, snakes, and alligators, and everything else that isn't civilized, and besides, he's discovered a gold-bearing reef like nothing that has hitherto been found in New Guinea, where the gold is in veins, though what on earth gold wants with veins I don't know. Oh! and there's another thing! I had almost forgotten it! He was at the *Murland* when it was burned out, and curiously enough he carries a miniature of a girl who is so like you, Janet, that my husband swears it is you, though of course that is absurd."

Janet laughed. "Of course, Lady Nancarrow."

"The odd thing is that he himself doesn't seem to know the girl whose likeness he carries—in a gold locket, Jimmy says. He showed it my husband, and asked him if he knew who the girl was?"

"What did Sir James say?" asked Janet quickly.

Her curiosity was only natural, but Lady Nancarrow, glancing at her, had a sudden impression that there was something more than curiosity behind the question. She made no reference to this, however, but laughed easily.

"Oh, you know my husband. He never wraps anything up, and when Rowley—that's the young man's name—showed him the likeness over the wine he cried bluntly: 'Why that's Janet Selby! Where the dickens did you pick up that, if you don't know her?' Mr. Rowley didn't tell him that. He simply said he had found the locket, when and where he did not explain; but he betrayed a very considerable curiosity about you, and when Jimmy said that he was bound to meet you if he did the society treadmill to which we were introducing him, he seemed quite pleased. My husband did not tell him about Vernon, so if he's in love with——"

Lady Nancarrow broke off, and laughed merrily, then clinched her remarks. "So you see, my dear Janet, you simply must come. I can't have a New Guinea millionaire going about with a face as savage as one of the cannibals among whom he lived on friendly terms. Heaven knows, he may have contracted their nasty habits, and may want to eat me if he doesn't meet you."

"Is he expecting to meet me?" asked Janet with a quick smile.

Lady Nancarrow laughed as she made the admission.

"You were the bait I held out to him in order

to secure his presence. And believe me if you can get him to talk about alligators and cannibals you'll be amply rewarded for coming. And of course, as I said, Vernon will be there. I telephoned to him before I came along here; so that you will have ample protection from my wild man of the woods, if it's needed."

Janet laughed, and looked at her mother. Mrs. Selby was smiling. Lady Nancarrow nodded, and without waiting for either of them to speak, took their consent for granted.

"Then it is settled. I shall expect you, and if you can drag Mr. Selby along with you, so much the better."

She rose, and after a word or two of trivial gossip took her departure, and when she had gone Mrs. Selby looked at her daughter.

"It is really very curious about that locket and miniature. I wonder where this young man found it, or to whom it belonged?"

"I wonder," said Janet.

"Of course, it must be the picture of some one bearing a very remarkable resemblance to you, Janet."

"That is very probable," answered the girl, with a laugh. "They say that everybody has a double somewhere in the world."

But though the matter was thus lightly dismissed, on the night following as she followed her mother up the steps of the Nancarrow mansion in Park Lane, Janet Selby was in a fever of curiosity, and very eager to meet the man who was in possession of the miniature. Their hostess divined the fact and laughed as she whispered:

"My wild man of the woods is here; glowering in a corner by himself. Wait in this room and

"I'll introduce you. He can't dance, but he can talk when he wants to, and somehow most of the men here look tame beside him."

A few minutes later the girl had a surprise. Lady Nancarrow had disappeared, and presently returned, talking animatedly to a tall man, with bronzed face, and with steel-blue eyes that seemed to note everything. His form suggested strength and self-reliance; and though his surroundings must have been entirely novel to him, his manner betrayed nothing of boorishness. As she came to a standstill before Janet, Lady Nancarrow scarcely noticed the girl. She was watching the young man with amused eyes, and was interested in the eager look upon his face.

"Miss Selby, may I introduce Mr. Rowley. He——"

She broke off at a hasty exclamation from Janet, and looking swiftly at her was surprised at the look of astonishment upon the girl's face.

"What is it, Janet?" she asked quickly.

"Mr. Rowley and I have met before, Lady Nancarrow. He is the gentleman who saved my life at the *Murland* the other night; I am sure of it."

Her hostess turned swiftly to the young man. "Mr. Rowley, is that so?"

Charles Rowley smiled. "I certainly carried Miss Selby down the fire-escape, but as for saving her life——"

"It is the same thing," broke in his hostess. "And I am very glad you and Miss Selby have met. I must go and find Mrs. Selby, and in the meantime Janet can thank you herself. She will want to do so, I am sure."

She turned and hurried away, leaving the two

alone. The girl looked at the young man, and began to speak hurriedly.

"Mr. Rowley, how can I thank——"

"Don't," he broke in abruptly. "I would much rather you didn't. I was very glad to be of service to you, and the more particularly as I was wanting to meet you."

But you know nothing about me," protested Janet wonderingly, though as he spoke, her mind recalled the locket of which Lady Nancarrow had spoken. "You had never seen me. How——"

"Pardon me, Miss Selby, I saw you on the afternoon of that day. You were driving in——"

Janet laughed suddenly. "You are the man who was in the taxi," she cried. "You rapped on the window, and I saw you, and wondered what on earth you were doing. I thought you must have made a mistake, and taken me for some one else."

Charles Rowley shook his head. "No, I did not make a mistake, I wanted to speak to you. As a matter of fact I was trying to find you at that very moment."

"You were trying to find me?" Janet was too astonished at his directness to say more.

"Yes," he answered simply, and thrusting a hand inside his dress coat, he drew forth a locket attached to a long thin chain of gold. Very deliberately he opened the locket, and held it towards her. "That is your picture, is it not?"