

CHAPTER XIII

THE MINIATURE

AS Charles Rowley held the locket towards her, Janet bent over it with eager curiosity, then she drew her breath sharply. There could be no question of the fact that the miniature was a speaking likeness of herself. But she was puzzled. Until quite recently, to the best of her knowledge no miniature of herself had been in existence. How then had this young man from the other side of the world come to possess one? The question was quite beyond any answer on her part, and after a moment she looked up, with wonder shining in her eyes.

"It is certainly very like me," she said slowly and thoughtfully, "so like that I am persuaded that it is I. But until three days ago there was no miniature of me in existence. How then——"

"There was this," interrupted Rowley quickly. "And it has been in my possession for some months."

Janet looked at the miniature again, then she asked :

"How did you come to have it? Pardon me for asking, Mr. Rowley; but I cannot help feeling curious on that point."

As she spoke she looked at the young man, and was astonished at the sudden sternness which came on his face. For what seemed quite a long time he did not reply, and when he did so his voice had an austere ring which surprised her.

"I cannot tell you that—yet, Miss Selby, at any rate. I can only tell you that I found it under rather tragic circumstances. Some day I may tell you

all, but I have yet many things to find out in relation to——”

He broke off without completing the sentence, and Janet saw that some one in the room had arrested his attention. She followed the direction of his gaze, and saw Vernon Shapland half a dozen yards away. His eyes were fixed upon her companion and herself, and he was frowning and biting his lips. She smiled a little as she thought to herself that her fiancé was jealous, and as she did so Charles Rowley spoke.

“There is a man there who might have helped me to find you, Miss Selby, but declined to do so. His name is Shapland, if I remember rightly. I saw him at Signor Crispi’s studio on the same afternoon that I saw you in the taxi. I was there inquiring about the miniature, and by accident he chanced to see it. At first he seemed to recognize the likeness, and took me to a club, but when we got there he found he had made a mistake, that he did not know the lady of the miniature.”

Janet Selby’s face had grown grave and thoughtful. For a moment she was silent, then she said:

“What you tell me is rather strange. I was at Crispi’s myself on that afternoon; indeed, I must have been in the studio at the time you were there, for Mr. Shapland and I had gone to the studio together, though he left before I did. I wonder why he——”

“You had gone there together?” There was surprise in Rowley’s tones.

“Yes; you see we are to be married shortly.”

“Married!”

This time there was something more than surprise in the young man’s tones. To Janet Selby there was what seemed like consternation, and she could

scarce forbear a smile as she recalled Lady Nancarrow's remarks about his being in love with her. But she did check the smile, as she saw Vernon Shapland stop his hostess and say something to her. As he did so, Lady Nancarrow glanced to where she was sitting with Rowley, and made some laughing reply, but the next moment she came towards them, a smile on her face. It was perfectly clear to Janet that her lover had asked Lady Nancarrow to break up the *tête-à-tête* between herself and Charles Rowley, and she was conscious of a feeling of resentment that he should do so. But she had no time to ask herself why he did that, for her companion was speaking again, and with a directness of utterance that amazed her.

"I am sorry to hear that, Miss Selby. That man is not a straight man. I am sure he lied to me the other day, and why he should do so remains for me to discover. And there is a further reason why I am sorry." He lifted the locket and looked at the miniature. "Since I found this the thought of the original has never been out of my mind. I cannot tell you all that I have thought, dreamed, hoped, but——" He paused for a second as he caught sight of Lady Nancarrow bearing down upon them, then he jerked out his last words, "What you have told me is the ruin of all. For months I have told myself that some day I—I——. It was presumptuous of me, of course, but——"

To Janet's relief, Lady Nancarrow broke in gaily.

"Mr. Rowley, you must come with me. Miss Selby will not be able to sleep if you talk further of alligators and cannibals; besides, her mother wishes to thank you for what you did the other night, and Sir James wants you to have a cigar with Mr. Selby and himself. So you must keep

what is left of your cannibals for another time, and there is a gentleman over there who is going to claim a dance with Miss Selby, if I am not mistaken."

She laughed as she glanced towards Vernon Shapland, but the laugh died away as she caught sight of the two faces in front of her. Janet's had a troubled look, whilst the young man's was mask-like, and the baronet's wife intuitively knew that she had intervened at a critical moment. But she was in no way abashed. She remembered her own light words, and, looking at Charles Rowley, young, individual with a suggestion of elemental strength that would appeal to most of her sex, she told herself that her interference was well-timed and wholly justifiable. The young man rose instantly and turned to Janet to excuse himself. But the girl spoke first.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Rowley, but—but life is full of odd twists. I——"

Vernon Shapland was approaching, and Lady Nancarrow was sufficiently near to hear every word. Conscious that it was impossible for her to say more the girl broke off, and before he turned away Rowley nodded.

"I understand, Miss Selby, but in my time I have seen odd twists unravelled more than once. Who knows but that this one ——" He caught the wonder in his hostess's eyes, and ended with a short laugh. "Lady Nancarrow is wondering what nonsense we are talking."

"Indeed I am," answered Lady Nancarrow, with laughing frankness, "but I haven't time to wait for an explanation. A hostess's life is slavery. You really must come, Mr. Rowley; and if you care to read me the riddle on the way I shall be duly grateful."

She turned, and Charles Rowley turned with

her. As he walked by her side in silence she would have liked to have asked what the "nonsense" meant, but after a glance at his face she forbore. She knew men, and she realized that this man would tell nothing that he did not wish to tell. But what she had overheard had a queer sound, and she made up her mind to ask Janet what it meant on the first opportunity. Something to do with the miniature, no doubt, or possibly with Janet herself. This young millionaire looked like a man of tremendous energy, perhaps already—she broke off her thoughts to smile at herself, wholly unconscious how near the truth she was.

As Charles Rowley moved away Vernon Shapland took the vacant place by Janet's side. At the sight of them in conversation he had been greatly disturbed, and his anxiety had grown sevenfold at the sight of the locket in Rowley's hand, and at the certainty that Janet had seen the miniature; but he gave no sign of what he felt, as he asked with a smiling face:

"Well, Janet, what do you think of Lady Nancarrow's wild man of the woods?"

"What do you think of him?" asked Janet quickly. "I understand that you have met him before."

For a moment Vernon Shapland was a little nonplussed. Being uncertain how much or how little Rowley might have said to the girl, he was not prepared for so direct a question. But after a moment he laughed easily.

"So he has told you how we met the other day, has he? And how he showed me a locket with a miniature in it that was so like you that—for a little time—I was deceived, and thought that it really was a portrait of you?"

"I have seen the miniature," answered Janet quickly. "And I am sure that it is a picture of myself."

Shapland smiled and shook his head.

"No, no, Janet; it is like you, I grant, but it is not you. It is not sufficiently beautiful."

The girl turned a deaf ear to this flattery.

"I am quite sure that it is I," she said firmly.

"Then in that case how comes this young man, from the wilds of New Guinea, to have it in his possession?"

As he asked the question his voice was almost casual, and gave no hint whatever of the consuming anxiety of which he was the prey. But he watched her with eyes that were fiercely eager, seeking to learn if she knew anything of the terrible truth, and he was conscious of tremendous relief as she shook her head.

"That I cannot tell you," she answered slowly. "He told me nothing except that he found it in tragic circumstances."

"He did not explain what the circumstances were?"

"No. He said that some day perhaps he might tell me all, but I gathered that there were things about those circumstances that he has yet to learn himself."

Vernon Shapland was conscious of a further lightening of heart.

"I do not know why he should trouble himself to do that," he replied easily. "In spite of the portrait bearing such a resemblance to you, it cannot possibly be you."

"It most certainly is I," answered Janet with conviction. "I am sure of it. Ah!"

"What is it?" he asked quickly, as the unexpected

exclamation told him that something had occurred to her.

"It has just crossed my mind that the question of identity should be a very easy one to settle. I gathered from Mr. Rowley that on the afternoon when you met him at Crispi's he had gone there to make inquiries about the miniature. That means that Crispi painted it; and an inquiry from him would settle the matter for good and all. I shall certainly ask him."

For a moment Vernon Shapland did not speak. He visioned a new danger against which he was powerless. It might be possible to prevent the man whose advent seemed a portent of trouble from meeting the artist; but Janet was a real danger. If she interested herself—Then as he suddenly remembered something a smile of relief came on his face and he answered lightly:

"You will be wasting your time. You must see that, if you think for a moment. How can it possibly be a portrait of yourself, when you have never given a sitting until quite recently?"

"You forget," she answered. "There are plenty of photographs of me in existence. It would be possible——"

His laughter broke on her explanation.

"Crispi and a photograph! Really, Janet, you ought to know better. Crispi would almost kill any person who suggested he should work from a photograph."

She knew that was true, and did not pursue the argument further.

"Yes," she agreed, "perhaps that is so." Then, as something occurred to her she asked curiously: "Vernon, why did you take Mr. Rowley away from Crispi's that afternoon, instead of letting him see the painter?"

"Because you were there, Janet. I wished to save you from annoyance. The man was plainly an uncultured boor, and no gentleman. He——"

"Do you know that you are talking of the man who saved my life at the *Murland* the other night?"

As the girl asked the question there was a snap in her tones, and her eyes flashed with indignation. But Vernon Shapland was too astonished by her words to notice her demeanour.

"What?" he cried. "What?"

"Mr. Rowley is the man who carried me out of my room and down the escape-ladder. I recognized him on the instant when Lady Nancarrow introduced him. And he is not a boor, far from it. He may be unused to the conventions of polite society, but he is simple and straightforward and transparently honest, and he is a very manly man. You only need to talk with him a few moments to realize that!"

Her companion having got over his first surprise, could not help noticing the indignation in her tones, but he did nothing to placate her.

"A perfect paragon, evidently!" he sneered.

"A man who risked his life to save mine!" retorted Janet sharply.

"A thing which most men would do if they had the chance," commented Shapland.

"I wonder," said the girl quickly. "There were other men there, but they did nothing. I wonder if you——"

"Janet!" he cried, anticipating her. "You must not say it. You know that I would—that there is nothing that I would not do for you!"

"Then please do not miscall my friends. It is not a nice thing to do at any time, but when a man has served me at the risk of his life it is abominable."

Her tone showed that she was in no way mollified, and when shortly afterwards she left him, he was under no illusion as to the extent to which he had transgressed. But he was not greatly disturbed by her attitude. Next time they met things would be on the old footing, and in any case they would be married in a couple of months.

But Rowley himself was another matter. As he thought of the miniature, and of the occasion when it had been lost, he was conscious of vague alarm. How much did this man know, and what was his relation to that other man who had crumpled up so suddenly by the tent door in far Papua?

He did not know, he could only conjecture vaguely, and as he walked to his club in Piccadilly an hour later he was conscious of the menace of the unknown, disturbed by the shadow of his own terrible deed. He would have been more disturbed if he had been aware of another shadow which followed him in and out among the night traffic of the street—a tall man, in rough clothes, who, as he followed almost at his heels, never took his eyes from his quarry. This man followed him to the steps of his club, and as he passed inside addressed himself to the uniformed doorkeeper.

"I say, sonny, that was Mr. Vernon who went in just now, wasn't it?"

The doorkeeper looked at the man who asked the question, and frowned at him for his familiar address, but he gave an answer, knowing that it would be the least trouble in the end.

"No!" he replied loftily. "That was Mr. Vernon Shapland of Shapland Manor."

"Lor', is that so?" asked the other with a grin. "An' where is this Shapland Manor?"

"Find out!" answered the doorkeeper, letting

the glass door swing back in his questioner's face.

The man who had asked the questions was not disturbed by this action. Very deliberately he read the name of the club on the brass plate on the door: then, turning, was soon lost in the human tide of Piccadilly.



CHAPTER XIV

MORESBY JACK

YOU'VE nothing like this in New Guinea, Rowley!"

The speaker was Sir James Nancarrow. He was seated on a magnificent horse, and clad in the scarlet coat of the fox-hunter. As he spoke he waved his hunting-crop in the direction of about thirty equestrians, who were chatting together whilst a cover was being drawn. The young man, who had just ridden up with his host, smiled and shook his head.

"No," he admitted, "we have nothing like this. But we've plenty of other things that offer excitement."

"Alligators and cannibals, hey?" Sir James laughed as he asked the question. "My wife seems to think that New Guinea is compact of those two things."

Charles Rowley did not reply, and the baronet, glancing at him, was interested to observe that the young man's attention was taken up by a couple of people who had just ridden up—the girl was Janet Selby and her companion was Vernon Shap-