

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-

land. Nancarrow smiled as he recognized them, and forced himself on his companion's attention.

"By the by, Rowley, my wife tells me that she introduced you to Miss Selby the other night. Did she turn out to be the lady whose picture you carry in that locket of yours?"

"Yes," answered the other quietly, "she is quite sure of it herself, though she has no knowledge whatever of the miniature."

"That is rather odd," commented the baronet.

"Yes," answered Rowley, as he lifted his hat to Janet, who had just bowed to him.

Sir James shot a quick glance at him, and then looked at Janet. There was a little flush on the girl's face, and in the young man's eyes was a light that was not to be mistaken. The baronet whistled softly to himself, and in his mind contrasted his companion with Vernon Shapland, to the latter's disadvantage.

"Rowley's hipped," he thought to himself, "and Janet's interested in him. Inevitable, of course, after all that's happened, and if it were not for the Manor, the Lord knows what would happen. I wonder if he knows about Vernon?"

Determined to find out, he left his thoughts and asked directly:

"Have you met Shapland—the man who is with Miss Selby, I mean?"

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"Didn't happen to run across him in New Guinea when he was over there, I suppose?"

Sir James was a little startled by what followed on his question. An amazed look came on the young man's face, and a sudden fierce light came in his eyes.

"New Guinea?" he said hoarsely. "No! Has Shapland been in New Guinea?"

"Quite recently. He spent some months there, I believe."

"But he led me to believe——" Rowley broke off the sentence abruptly. He had been on the point of revealing something that in view of the astounding thing he had just heard was better left unsaid.

Sir James guessed as much, and impelled by an overpowering curiosity, pressed for information.

"What were you about to say, Rowley?"

But the young man was on his guard now, and, his face like a mask, replied:

"I was about to say that I did not know that Shapland had ever been in New Guinea."

Sir James nodded. He knew that the answer was an evasion, but recognized that it was useless to press the matter further.

"He has, however, though as New Guinea is a big place it is easy to understand that you did not meet him there. But—by Jove!"

The last exclamation had no connexion with what he had been on the point of saying. It was jerked from him by an illuminating thought that had suddenly flashed in his mind. He began to laugh silently, and Rowley looked at him with questioning eyes. Then, still laughing, the baronet asked quickly: "Rowley, where did you find that locket of yours? In England or New Guinea?"

For a moment the young man did not reply, but frowned thoughtfully as if the question were one requiring consideration before answering. Then he said quietly: "In New Guinea."

"By Jove! I knew it!"

In his excitement the baronet brought down

his hunting-crop on one of his top boots, startling his horse. When he had quieted it he looked at his companion, and said laughingly :

“Rowley, I’ll bet you a tenner that Vernon Shapland knows all about that locket and miniature.

The young man did not take the wager, nor did he join in the other’s laughter. His face was very serious and his tones grave, as he asked :

“What makes you think that, Sir James ? ”

“It’s as plain as a barn-door,” answered the baronet. “Vernon Shapland and Miss Selby are engaged to be married. The engagement is very recent, it is true ; as a matter of fact it has only been announced since Shapland returned from abroad, but everybody at this end of the county knows that he has been in love with Janet for years. It’s the most natural thing in the world that he should carry her picture about with him in the fashion of the devout lover, and that he should lose it somewhere whilst on his travels is not in the nature of a miracle.”

“But Miss Selby told me herself that she had no knowledge of the miniature.”

“Pooh ! What of that ? She admits the likeness, and photographs of her are fairly common. The explanation of its existence is as clear as day light, and I’ll wager you five to one that Shapland claims the miniature on sight,”

Charles Rowley knew that he would not ; but he did not say so. His eyes turned to Vernon Shapland, and there came a look of frowning incredulity on his face. He had not yet recovered from the shock of the information which Sir James had so innocently given him, and he was startled at the possibilities it suggested, possibilities which

Shapland's affected ignorance of New Guinea and denial of the identity of the miniature seemed to transform to probabilities—almost. But why should Vernon Shapland have slain Jim, his foster-brother, whom probably he had never previously set eyes on? The thing was unreasonable. There was no ground, no motive for such a crime. He turned abruptly to the baronet.

"Why did Shapland go to New Guinea, Sir James? Can you tell me that?"

The baronet shook his head.

"No! I have never asked, though I fancy I did hear something about business of his uncle's."

"His uncle."

"Yes, Sir Charles Shapland, of the Manor. He's away from home just now on the Riviera. His health is rather poor and—— By Jove! we're off."

A fox had suddenly broken cover, and as the hounds gave tongue, there was a move forward on the part of all the equestrians. Sir James forgot all about the subject they had been discussing, and as the hounds in a trailing line turned towards some wild country dotted with furze and outcropping rock, he laughed joyously.

"The fox is making for Lambert Barrow. There'll be some rough riding!"

He moved forward, and Charles Rowley followed automatically. He rode well, having been for two years a boundary rider on an Australian sheep-run; but the chase had now no interest for him, and his mind was exercised by the appalling thing to which his new-found knowledge seemed to point.

So Vernon Shapland had been in New Guinea, though he had affected to have no knowledge whatever of that country. He was engaged to Miss Selby, whose miniature Boromai had found on the

scene of the crime, and having seen the miniature he had denied any knowledge of the original ; though owning that he had found a certain resemblance in the portrait to some one whom he knew—so accounting for his manifest interest therein. But why should Shapland have denied his knowledge to himself, when other people were aware of his journey to New Guinea ? And what could have been the business that took him there, if Sir Charles Shapland had no interests in New Guinea, and was supremely indifferent to business matters ?

A phrase from his foster-brother's diary leaped suddenly to mind. " Don't know who the man was, but his voice had a toney sound which suggested that he was some sort of swell ! " That rather vague description would fit Vernon Shapland ; and all the facts and conjectures dove-tailed together in an amazing way. But if Shapland had been the man who fired the fatal shot why had he done so ? That question fairly gravelled him ; and as he rode his mind racked itself for any motive that would link the other pieces of evidence firmly together—and racked itself in vain.

He was still worrying over the matter, two hours later, when chance brought him into contact with Janet Selby, who was standing apart from the other members of the hunt during the drawing of a fresh cover. As he approached her, leading his horse, a little touch of colour came in the girl's face, but she showed no other sign of embarrassment. The young man noticed the colour, and divining that she was thinking of his daring utterance at Lady Nancarrow's ball, determined that it should not come between them, so when Janet had given him rather formal greeting, he introduced the matter.

" I am very glad to have this opportunity for

a word with you, Miss Selby. I am afraid that I was rather presumptuous the other night; but —”

Janet immediately showed signs of distress.

“Please do not mention it; Mr. Rowley. I owe you far too much to allow myself to be offended by that. Besides,”—she broke off, blushed a little and laughed a little, and then continued,—“besides, after all, no woman ought to be offended by a thing of that kind. It is the highest compliment a man can pay.”

Her laughter banished all embarrassment, and somehow her words and manner of speaking gave Rowley an uplift of heart. But he did not presume upon them.

“It is very good of you to think so of the matter, Miss Selby. To be sudden is always rather a weakness of mine. I——”

He broke off, and stood staring beyond her, his eyes fixed on some undergrowth just behind.

“There is a man hidden there,” he said in a low voice. “He is listening to our conversation.”

Janet turned quickly, and caught sight of a lean yellow face, hanging as it seemed in the bushes. She nodded to her companion.

“That is the third time I have seen that man hiding near me this morning. I wonder what he wants. I do not like it.”

“The third and last time,” laughed Rowley.

He jumped forward, caught the eavesdropper by the collar, and dragged him out into the open.

“What do you mean skulking in the bushes like that?”

The man growled an oath, and the attention of the hunt was drawn to the little group of three.

“What the blazes has it to do wi’ you. This

here's a free country, ain't it? You let go o' my collar or I'll smash——"

Rowley stopped the threat by shaking him until his teeth chattered, then suddenly he cried out:

"Ah, I know you! You're Jack Cordery—Moresby Jack! What on earth are you doing here?"

Cordery, for he it was, twisted himself loose.

"That's none o' your business!" he shouted, and broke into a stream of curses.

"Stop that!" cried Rowley sharply, and lifted his hunting crop threateningly.

Cordery saw that discretion was the better part of valour. The cursing stopped, and he slunk towards the bushes, looking round as he did so. The man upon whom he had really been spying had disappeared. Having made sure of that, he snarled over his shoulder:

"All right, Rowley! You'll wish you hadn't interfered some day, I'll stake my affydavy on that!"

The words were not a threat, but they sounded such in the ears of many who heard them. Men looked from one to the other and smiled meaningly.

"A deuced queer customer, that!" commented one.

"A deuced queer thing altogether!" said another.

"I'd give a sovereign to know what lies behind it," laughed a third. "Something shady, I'll bet! Anyway, there's more in it than meets the eye. Rowley knows the fellow, and the fellow knows Rowley, and——"

A hound suddenly gave tongue, and others followed in chorus. The hunters moved on to the chase once more, and for the moment the matter was forgotten.