

I saw the woman again later. She told me that she had found John Vernon, and a minute or two later I saw Vernon Shapland stop his car to pick her up, and drive away down the London road."

Sir James rose to his feet. "Janet," he cried, "this is terrible for you."

"It has been very terrible to know it, and to decide what to do for the best," answered Janet quietly. "But now the matter is out of my hands and I have to decide nothing further. I came here meaning to tell you if it seemed necessary for Mr. Rowley's safety, but not otherwise. What will you do, Sir James?"

"I shall find that woman," answered the baronet energetically. "It is clear that she does not know of her husband's death, and to me it seems certain that she will be able to unravel this problem. You have nothing more to tell me, Janet?"

"No!"

"Then you must excuse me. I must go up to town at once. There is no time to lose. This woman simply must be found now. I will send my wife in to you, and, Janet—keep a good heart!"

"I will try," answered Janet, but when Lady Nancarrow entered the room she found her sobbing as if her heart would break.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A PHOTOGRAPH

THE assistant-commissioner of police sat in his office at New Scotland Yard, listening thoughtfully to what Sir James Nancarrow had to

tell him, from time to time making a note on a writing-pad before him. In a chair near the window sat another man, utterly commonplace in appearance, but one of the cleverest men of the C.I.D., who also made occasional notes, and when Sir James had finished his story this man spoke.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, addressing his chief.

"A half-hour or so ago a phone message came through from Limehouse that I think may relate to this case. A woman had just heard that her husband had been murdered somewhere in Hampshire, and had stopped an officer to inquire what she should do. We have the woman's address, and it might be worth while making an inquiry. Of course it may be just the maundering of an hysterical woman, but on the other hand it may be this man Cordery's wife."

The assistant-commissioner nodded.

"Yes, Garforth, it will be worth while to make an inquiry. The sooner the better or we may lose sight of her. If you go now——"

"Yes, sir."

Inspector Garforth rose and left the room.

"A good man!" commented the assistant-commissioner. "If there's anything in what you suggest Garforth will find it out, though to tell the truth to me it looks a very simple case indeed, and should have presented no difficulty even to the rural constabulary."

"You forget that our local officers do not know the facts which I have placed before you, Mr. Scott, and, if I may say so, their regard for local magnates is such that they are inclined to allow themselves to be overawed."

The assistant-commissioner smiled.

"Yes, I can understand that. But we are not like that at the Yard here, and having taken the matter up you may be sure we shall see it through. Garforth will be down for the adjourned inquest to-morrow, and you can rely on his abilities, Sir James."

The telephone bell on the officer's desk began to whirr, and the baronet rose from his chair, spoke a few words of thanks, and took his departure, his heart considerably lighter than it had been when he entered the office. After all, if Mrs. Cordery could be found, Charles Rowley's innocence should be easy to establish.

On the following morning when he entered the large room at the *Shapland Arms*, for the adjourned inquest, he looked anxiously round. Inspector Garforth was there, and caught his eyes. He gave an almost imperceptible nod towards two women sitting in the front row. They were both strangers in the parish, and Sir James concluded that one of them was Cordery's widow. He was wondering what revelations she would make when the coroner entered and took his place at the table, and a moment later Charles Rowley entered in charge of a couple of policemen. He saw Sir James, and smiled cheerfully, then his eyes fell on the two women in the front row, and the baronet saw him give a start of recognition. A moment later the proceedings were formally opened by the coroner, who for the jury's edification read over the evidence taken at the previous inquest. When he had finished he looked round and asked a question of his officer.

"Has that woman arrived?"

"Yes, sir."

"Call her!"

"Jane Cordery!" called the officer in stentorian

tones, and one of the two women rose from her seat and stepped forward.

There was a buzz of whispered comment whilst the woman was taking the oath, but when the coroner addressed her the silence became profound.

"You are Jane Cordery?" asked the coroner.

"Yes, sir."

"You have seen the body of the man the circumstances of whose death the court is investigating?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you recognize it?"

"Yes, sir," replied the woman with an audible sob, "it is Jack—my husband."

The coroner waited for a moment to allow the woman to recover herself, then he asked his next question.

"Did you know that your husband was coming down to Shapland?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what was the purport of his visit?"

"I know that he was coming to see a man about some money, sir. He was expecting to get a large amount, and said something about a regular income which would make it unnecessary for him to work again. He had an idea that it would support a little schooner, which he meant to run among the islands, him being terrible fond of the sea."

For a full minute the scratching of the coroner's pen seemed to fill the room, then he inquired:

"Your husband was a stranger in Shapland, and indeed in England? He came, I believe, from New Guinea?"

"Yes, sir. He was a Queenslander, but he'd lived for years in New Guinea."

"Do you know if, when he came to England,

he came to try and get this money that you have spoken of?"

"Yes, sir. He came after the money."

"Do you know the source of this money, of his expectations? I mean had he any inheritance or legacy upon which he was counting?"

"No, sir. He'd no inheritance, his folk having always been poor."

"Then do you know how he expected to get hold of this money—a large amount, I think you said?"

The widow's face flushed painfully, and when she spoke it was with obvious reluctance

"He never told me himself, Jack didn't. He was very close at times, but now and again he'd let a word slip that made me think."

"Then after all you have an idea?"

"Well, you may say it's an idea, sir; it certainly isn't anything more. But it has run in my mind that Jack was expecting to get money from the man he came to see, because the man had done something in New Guinea that he shouldn't have done."

"You think your husband came to England to levy blackmail?"

"Yes, sir, I have that idea," replied the widow shamefacedly; "but mind you, I don't know for certain, and it's no more than an idea."

The coroner wrote that answer down, and looked round the court before he asked his next question. His eye caught that of Inspector Garforth, who gave him an almost imperceptible nod.

"What was the man whom your husband came to see supposed to have done in New Guinea?"

The woman hesitated, then said slowly: "Well, sir, I'm a little in doubt. When my husband was in drink he let slip something about the man having

shot Charles Rowley, but when I met Mr. Rowley I knew that Jack must have made a mistake of some sort—and I was too surprised and frightened for anything, as Mr. Rowley will remember.”

She glanced at the young man as she spoke, and as he recalled the incident on the quayside a sudden understanding of what had puzzled him at that time was vouchsafed to Charles Rowley. He nodded sympathetically to her, and after a moment the coroner's voice broke in again :

“ Do you know the name of the man whom your husband was expecting to meet here at Shapland ? ”

“ Yes, sir. It was John Vernon.”

“ You are sure about the name ? ”

“ I am quite sure that was the name the man called himself in New Guinea, though whether it was his real name or not I have my doubts.”

There was a stir among the spectators, as almost instinctively they looked round at Charles Rowley, and what they plainly thought had its echo in the questions that followed.

“ You think the name may have been an assumed one ? Did you know this man who called himself John Vernon ? ”

“ I saw him once at New Guinea, sir. And I have seen him at Shapland here within the last few days.”

A wave of excitement swept the spectators, and even the coroner was not unaffected by it.

It was plain from the expression on his face that the answer had been in part unexpected, and for a moment the formality of his manner broke down.

“ You have seen him at Shapland during the last few days ? Please look round the court and tell me if you see him now ? ”

The woman looked round. Sir James was at

one with the other spectators as he watched her with intense curiosity. He saw her eyes fall upon Charles Rowley, and as her gaze wandered on Sir James was conscious of relief.

"No, sir," answered the woman, when she had gazed all round. "He is not here."

"Are you quite sure?" asked the coroner, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, sir, quite."

"Do you recognize any one in the room?" asked the coroner, who had seen her nod at Rowley.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Rowley! He was very kind to me coming to England from Australia, and I'm sure he wouldn't have murdered my husband. Besides, John Vernon must have been already in England when Mr. Rowley was just leaving Australia, and in addition I've got a photograph of him, sir."

"You've got a photograph of John Vernon?"

The coroner's amazement was extreme, and the excitement of the spectators grew more pronounced. They were too interested to trouble about the noise made by the opening of a door at the back of the room. Only Inspector Garforth noticed that, and swung round to glance at the new-comer. It was Vernon Shapland, and as he glanced down the room and saw Jane Cordery standing by the table, a look of mingled surprise and apprehension came upon his face. Garforth saw that look, and saw also that the new-comer turned to leave the room again, then apparently he changed his mind, and, with his face half-turned away, stood listening. Inspector Garforth moved a little so that he could command a view of the averted face, then the woman spoke again.

"Yes, sir. It's one Jack—my husband—got

from a missionary at Port Moresby. It's a photograph of the Cooktown boat leaving Moresby, and John Vernon is leaning over the side."

The inspector had turned to the witness as she gave this explanation, and he did not see the stark fear which leapt in Vernon Shapland's eyes, nor did he see him turn towards the door again. Like every one else Garforth was interested in the dramatic episode of the photograph, and when the coroner asked his next question he leaned forward in his eagerness to catch the answer.

"Have you the photograph with you?"

"Yes, sir."

The woman produced it, and handed it to the coroner, who as he adjusted his pince-nez asked "Which do you say is John Vernon?"

"The man standing with his sun-helmet in his hand, next to a young lady who is waving her hand, who is the daughter of the missionary who took the photograph."

The inspector saw the coroner glance at the picture, and as he did so a startled look came on his face. He looked helplessly round, then his eyes sought the photograph once more.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked at last.

"Quite sure," answered the woman quietly. "And it's a very good likeness."

"It happens to be," answered the coroner, then looked from her to Inspector Garforth.

The officer stepped forward, and as he looked at the photograph the coroner whispered something to him. Garforth nodded, and as his eyes left the photograph, he looked down the room, to find that the man whom he sought had disappeared.