

or I'm a Dutchman. Please stop at the telegraph office again. I must send off more telegrams. I've got a description of the car, and the number, though as like as not he'll change that somewhere, if he thinks of it."

"Do you think he will get away?"

"No," answered the inspector slowly. "It is true he has a fast car, but he hasn't a sufficient start to get ahead of the telegraph. We shall hear of him before the day is out."

CHAPTER XXVII

A CONFESSION

INSPECTOR GARFORTH'S anticipations as regards Charles Rowley were fulfilled in a little over the time he had estimated. Within two hours of the adjourning of the inquest he was set free, and Sir James Nancarrow, at his wife's instigation rode over to the Selbys to inform them of the fact. As he turned his horse into the drive a telegraph messenger on a bicycle swept past him, and Sir James wondered idly what his message might be. Before he reached the house he met the messenger returning, and as he rode up to the door Mrs. Selby hurried out, with consternation on every line of her features.

"There is a message from Vernon," she cried. "He wants Janet to go to him."

"Wants Janet to go to him!" The baronet stared at her as if he could not believe his ears.

"Yes, there has been an accident, and his car is smashed up. According to the message he is

badly injured, and he has something of great importance to tell Janet. The wire is signed by a Dr. Mason. Janet insists on going, and her father is not here, and I can't possibly go with her, whilst if it is true what they are saying in the village that a Scotland Yard inspector has been to the Manor, and is after Vernon, Janet most certainly ought not to go. Just think how people will talk."

"Let them talk," replied Sir James. "Under the circumstances I think Janet ought to go; and, if you like, my wife and I will go with her. If Vernon Shapland has been injured, and has something of importance to say, Janet or some one else most certainly ought to hear it, and it is possible that there is no time to waste. Where is Shapland?"

"He is at a cottage near Shaftesbury in Dorset; the name is on the telegram."

Sir James considered a moment, then he said: "I will use the telephone if I may, Mrs. Selby. It will be quicker than riding back home, and my wife can meet Janet and myself at the cross-roads. You can send one of the grooms back with my horse, and we shall save time all round that way."

"But why should Janet——"

"Because, as I understand, this telegram asks specifically for Janet, and it is possible that Vernon Shapland would refuse to communicate what he has to tell to any one else, and I fancy that might prove of importance to Janet herself. Shapland can be very stubborn and——ah!"

He broke off as Janet appeared in the hall dressed for travelling. Her face was very pale, and her eyes had a tragic look, but otherwise she was quite composed. Sir James stepped forward.

"I have heard the news, Janet, and I think you are doing quite right to go. I have just told your

mother that my wife and I will accompany you as she herself is unable to do so. I will just telephone to Lady Nancarrow, and she will meet us."

He stepped into the hall as Janet tried to thank him, and rang up the Exchange. Five minutes later, when he emerged, Janet was already seated in the car which had come round in the interval, and with a nod of good-bye to Mrs. Selby Sir James took his seat by the chauffeur and they started off.

As they passed through the village Inspector Garforth hailed them, and they drew up for a moment.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked the baronet in a low voice.

"Yes," answered Sir James, "we're going down to Shaftesbury now."

"He's in a pretty bad way, I understand," replied the inspector, "but after all it is better for every one concerned that it should come this way—rather than in the other. I am going to run down myself by train, after I have seen Mr. Rowley, though I don't fancy I shall be needed. I may see you there."

Sir James nodded, and they moved on once more, and a mile and a half outside the village they found Lady Nancarrow waiting. She threw a fur-lined coat to her husband, and slipped into the car beside Janet.

"My dear girl," she said affectionately, "I am sorry that you have to make this journey; but perhaps it is all for the best."

"I hope so," answered Janet. "When the message came I felt that I could not refuse, though I do not want to go. It is awful to think of what Vernon may have to say. But you know it may affect——"

"I know, my dear, and I think you are very brave. Please don't try to talk to me. You will need all your strength for the ordeal before you."

Rather more than two hours later they reached Shaftesbury, and on the outskirts of the ancient town came to a standstill to inquire the way to the cottage where Vernon Shapland was lying.

"Take the new road out of town, an' ee'll find it at the bottom ov the hill," answered the man of whom they made inquiry. "'Ee can't miss it, vor a policeman be hanging about the door, though what he be there vor I can't tell 'ee, except that there be a gentleman there what hav smashed his-zelf to pieces by trying to go down the old road in a car zame as yours. Ee'll zee the car too, or what be left ov 't, when it smashed up it got on vire somehow an' a rare mix up it be now."

Sir James gave the man a shilling, and the car moved on, according to the directions given. In the course of three minutes they passed a point where a group of wondering rustics stood staring at the wreckage of a car. Sir James turned round, and saw a very steep road down which apparently Vernon Shapland had driven. He shuddered as he thought of what it would mean to come down it in a car that had got out of control, and the next moment he caught sight of the policeman mentioned by the man who had directed them. He was standing across the road from a cottage which was set in a little garden and his eyes were fixed thoughtfully on an upper window, where a nurse's cap showed between the white curtains. As the car pulled up he stepped forward and saluted.

"Are you friends of this man who has been hurt?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Sir James, stepping out of the car. "How is he?"

"Terr'ble bad by all accounts. The doctor's there now, and the district nurse, though I fear 't isn't much good they can do. 'The wonder is that the gentleman is alive at all. He came tearing down that old road there like an express train. I was a bit lower down the road there, an' I heard him coming, and turned round just in time to see the smash up. There was a long timber cart turning up the new road, and it blocked the way for him, otherwise he might have made the passage safely. He saw the timber cart, and blew the horn like mad. The men did their best, but the load was a heavy one, an' a timber-carriage don't manoeuvre as easily as a bicycle. I think he knew he was bound to come a smash of some sort, an' he turned the car into that bank there, which looks soft an' green, but which is most deceptive, being a stone wall, grown over with grass an' what not. The car crumpled up like a matchbox, an' overturned, an' then began to blaze like dry faggots. The gentleman was thrown clear, but he was terrible knocked about; and when I got him in the cottage he looked like a dead man. I sent for the doctor, an' reported to the inspector, an' half an hour later I was told to remain here an' keep an eye on the house an' see the man didn't leave it, though the Lord knows he's in no condition for that; an' I can't think why I should be sticking here, instead of going my rounds. It's a slow job."

Sir James did not enlighten the man. "You say the doctor is inside?" he asked.

"Yes, sir! An' if you——"

The baronet turned to the car. Janet's face was very pale, and it was clear that she dreaded the coming ordeal.

"I think we had better go to the house," he said simply, and after helping them down, he opened the gate and led them towards the cottage. As they went down the path the door opened, and a kindly Dorset woman stood to receive them. She looked at Janet.

"Be you the young lady the doctor telegraphed vor?"

"Yes," answered Janet tremulously.

"Then I be terr'ble glad ee've come, miss. The young gentleman d' keep askin' vor 'ee."

They entered the small living-room, and as they did so a middle-aged man came down the rickety stairs.

"Dr. Mason," said the woman quickly, with a look towards Janet, "this be the young lady."

The doctor bowed to her gravely.

"I am very glad you have arrived, Miss Selby. You are in time, but I must tell you that there is no possible hope of Mr. Shapland's recovery. He is terribly injured. It is only a matter of hours, if of that. I will tell him that you have arrived."

He disappeared up the stairs again, and after a few minutes returned. "Now, if you are ready, Miss Selby."

Janet flashed an imploring glance at Sir James, who looked at the doctor. The latter understood the look, and answered it.

"Perhaps it will be best. The nurse is leaving the room as soon as Miss Selby enters, as I understand what he has to say is of a very private nature. But if you are a friend possibly Mr. Shapland will not mind your presence."

Janet turned towards the stairs. Her face was very white, and it was plain that the task before her was a very trying one. The doctor looked at

her and whispered to the baronet: "If you should need it, there's brandy on the chest in the bedroom."

Sir James nodded, and swiftly followed the girl upstairs. As they entered the room the nurse withdrew, closing the door behind her, and Janet and Sir James moved towards the bed. Vernon Shapland lay there, his head bandaged, his eyes closed, one hand lying outside the clothes picking at the patch-work quilt. There was a grey look on the face, and, even as they watched, his mouth quivered with pain. Janet took another step forward.

"Vernon," she said quietly. "Vernon."

Shapland opened his eyes, and Sir James saw the light of recognition flash into them; then he spoke in a weak voice.

"It is very good of you to come. Janet—I—I was afraid you might not get—get here in time."

"I came at once," answered Janet simply.

"That is just like you," he commented whisperingly, "and it is well that you did so, for—for I have something very important to—tell you."

A spasm of pain shook him, and as it passed his eyes closed and remained closed for quite a long time. Janet looked at Sir James, and what she feared was written in her face. The baronet shook his head, and, reassured, Janet turned to the bed again.

"Yes, Vernon," she said gently, "you have something to tell me?"

The injured man's eyes opened. "A great deal, Janet. I—I am afraid that it will shock you, but—but I must tell you. It is about Rowley—Charles Rowley—my cousin, you know."

"Your cousin!" As Janet cried the words she wondered if his mind were wandering, and the

thought was indexed so clearly in her face that Shapland read it, and half-smiled.

"Yes, my cousin," he answered, in a stronger voice. "A son of Sir Charles, my uncle, whom none of you knew of, and of whose existence I was in ignorance until just before I went to New Guinea."

"Ah!" The ejaculation broke from Janet almost without her volition, forced from her by the sudden realization of all that followed from this statement. The reason for the seemingly purposeless murder of Jim Rowley had become instantly clear to her as to Sir James, who had had the story from Charles Rowley. She sat there unable to speak another word, shaken by the horror of the conviction which had come to her, and Shapland, with closed eyes, continued his statement.

"My uncle told me of him. His son had been lost as a child, and for over twenty years nothing had been heard of him, but just before I left England there came a clue—and I went to New Guinea to investigate—to try and find him. I—never meant that he should come to England. For twenty years I had been looked upon as the heir of Shapland. I was deeply in debt, and—and I loved you. I knew that if the man I went to look for was my cousin I was ruined, and that you would never— So when I found him, as I thought, I shot him, and when I returned I told my uncle that he was dead; but—but I had shot the wrong man. It seems that he had a foster-brother—"

"Oh, I know, I know," cried Janet, her heart wrung with horror.

"Then there is no need for me to tell you," continued Shapland. "I came back to England. I felt quite safe; I thought no one knew. But I was mistaken. That man Cordery, who came to

Shapland, knew. He had been my guide in New Guinea—and a native told him what had happened. He came to England to—to blackmail me. He told me that I had killed the wrong man, that the man who had saved you at the *Murland* was the man I had meant to kill. His terms were impossible, and, besides, I knew that I should never be safe, so I—I——”

His voice failed, and his eyes closed. Janet glanced hastily at the baronet. Her face was full of horror, induced by the terrible confession to which she had listened. Sir James stepped forward, thinking the end had come, but as he did so Vernon Shapland's eyes opened once more and his lips began to move, but his voice now was no more than a husky whisper.

“I know that it seems an awful thing to say, but—but it was because I was afraid of losing you, that I—that I did what I did. You were more to me than Shapland, and I—have always loved you. That is my only excuse.”

Janet's mind went back to the eve of his departure to New Guinea. She remembered his passionate declaration, and knew that what the dying man said was true. In his own perverted way he had loved her, passionately, and notwithstanding the terrible things he had done she was conscious of a stirring of pity in her heart.

“I have lost you,” whispered Shapland, “lost you—for ever. But you will stay with me, Janet, until—until——”

His eyes sought hers imploringly, and her own eyes were dim with tears as she answered, “Yes.”

Again his eyes closed, and remained so for quite a long time. The silence in the room deepened. An hour passed without word or sign from Shap-

land that he was conscious of Janet's presence. Then he moved a little, the eyelids were raised flutteringly, and for one moment he looked at the watching girl.

"You are very good, Janet—you will tell Rowley and my uncle——"

The whisper failed, the eyelids fell once more, and a tremor shook his broken frame. A moment later Janet knew that her vigil was over, and as Sir James Nancarrow stepped forward and placed a kindly hand on her shoulder, she broke into a storm of tears.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LOVELIGHT

"THAT is an amazing story about Charles Rowley being Sir Charles Shapland's son," said the baronet half an hour later. "I wonder how it is that the fact has been kept hidden so long."

"Probably because Sir Charles thought that his son was dead," answered Janet thoughtfully. "But do you think it is true?"

"There isn't the shadow of a doubt of it," broke in Lady Nancarrow, who had been told of the confession. "Sir James and I have remarked more than once that Mr. Rowley is very like some one whom we both know, but neither of us could recall who it was. Now I know. It is Sir Charles. There is quite a wonderful likeness, in spite of the disparity of age."