

shudder. After all, she told herself, there is a Providence that watches over the world, that——

The sound of voices in the hall outside broke upon her thoughts, and she was conscious of a sudden access of nervousness. The next moment the door opened, and she caught the sound of Lady Nancarrow's voice, light and teasing.

"Five minutes only, by the clock, Charles. At the end of that time I shall interrupt ruthlessly, as Janet is very tired."

She heard the door close, caught the sound of an advancing footstep, and rising quickly from her chair she turned round.

As she did so she saw the love-light in her lover's eyes, and all the burden of sadness rolled from her heart, and the shadows of care fled from her eyes.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### MY SON!

SIR CHARLES SHAPLAND sat in a reserved compartment of the boat express, with his friend, Nancarrow, in the opposite corner. He had the look of a man over whom the years of life had gone heavily, and it was clear that he was much shaken by recent news.

"It is very sad Vernon should have died like that in the heyday of life," he said, in the voice of a man for whom sorrow has become too great. "I had thought better of him these last few months, and had hoped that he would have been more with me in the future. How did the accident happen? Give me details."

Sir James gave them in part, and Sir Charles listened quietly, and at the end spoke again.

"He was my heir," he said, "the only one in the male line, and now the title will become extinct, and Shapland pass to people of another name."

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked his companion significantly.

Sir Charles caught the significant note in the questioner's voice and flashed a startled look.

"What do you mean, Nancarrow?"

"I mean just what I ask," answered Nancarrow quietly. "Are you quite sure that you have no heir in the male line? Before Vernon died he told a strange story of a long-lost son of yours, and he even identified him with a young friend of mine, a pioneer from New Guinea."

The startled look on Sir Charles' face had grown more pronounced. There was an eager light in his eyes, and his voice was trembling as he cried—"New Guinea! What does your young friend call himself, Nancarrow?"

"Rowley, Charles Rowley!"

"Why, that is the name of the man whom I sent poor Vernon to find in New Guinea. But I forget; you do not know——"

"I heard Vernon tell the story," interrupted Nancarrow quickly, "so that I know enough for practical purposes."

"But Vernon said that this man, Rowley, was dead!"

"He was mistaken," replied Sir James quietly. "It was his foster-brother who died, and Vernon confused the two. The mistake was a very natural one—under the circumstances. And it is certain that Vernon himself believed that he was your son,

for just before he died he gave instructions that you should be informed."

"That was very thoughtful of poor Vernon," commented Sir Charles gratefully. Then he leaned forward eagerly.

"And what does Charles—Charles Rowley say about the matter? Does he claim to be my son?"

"He knows nothing whatever about it yet; for I thought it better that he should be kept in ignorance until you yourself knew what Vernon had told us; for, as you may guess, the matter was rather startling to people who had had no hint of any such possibility."

"Then what do you think, Nancarrow? Do you think this young man is my son?"

"I think there is little doubt of it. There is a quite remarkable likeness between you."

Sir Charles did not speak for a little time. His mind went back across the years to the wife and child who had been lost to him so tragically, and he visioned what life might yet be, if, after all, Charles Rowley should prove to be that long-lost child. When he next looked at his friend, the listlessness of sorrow had gone from his bearing, and a new light of hope was shining in his eyes.

"I pray God you may be right, Nancarrow! You cannot know what this means to me. For twenty-three years I have tried to hope, and all the time I have been dogged by despair—by despair and by the awful thought that the two people whom one loved best in the world had fallen into the hands of the most cruel savages on earth."

"Was it like that, Shapland?" asked the other quickly.

"Yes," answered Sir Charles, and gave a brief

résumé of the tragedy that had happened in far Papua. When he had finished Sir James Nancarrow stretched a hand towards his friend. He was greatly moved.

"My dear Shapland, what you must have gone through! And to think none of us knew! If Rowley is not your son, I shall never forgive myself for moving you to new hope!"

Sir Charles smiled.

"Somehow I feel that there is no need to doubt. I have a presentiment that he is my boy, that fate is proving kind at last—and that within a very few hours my hope will be confirmed. Is the boy at The Towers?"

"Yes! Before I came away I arranged that he should wait for me there. I told him that I wanted him to call with me on an old friend of mine. It is my idea that when we reach Shapland you should drive to the Manor, and that I should call at my place for him and bring him to see you. It seems only the right thing that you two should meet in your own home."

"That is very thoughtful of you," replied Sir Charles. "It is a very good plan."

Little more was said until they reached Shapland, but as Sir Charles moved to the car awaiting him, he looked at his friend.

"Please hurry, Nancarrow! I am in a fever of impatience. Remember I have waited half a life-time for this hour."

The millionaire nodded his understanding. "I shall not delay."

A quarter of an hour later he arrived at The Towers to find Janet and his wife with Charles Rowley talking together in front of the house.

"Charles," he said, without leaving the car,

"I want you to come with me at once. The friend who wishes to see you is now at home."

Rowley moved towards the car, and as he did so Lady Nancarrow stepped forward.

"Why should not Janet and I go also? The drive would do both of us good."

Her husband looked at Janet. Her face was still pale, owing to the strain of the past few days, but her eyes were glad, and now as they met his they were full of eager light. He smiled at her as he replied:

"There is no reason why you should not. Come, by all means, but please do not keep us waiting. Sir Charles is naturally impatient."

The two ladies disappeared into the house, and as they did so, the younger man turned to his host.

"Sir Charles?" he asked. "Is it Sir Charles Shapland whom we are going to see?"

"Yes," answered the baronet.

"But why should he be so anxious to see me? I hope he does not want to discuss his nephew's guilt. That is a thing I want to forget for ever."

"No, it is not for that he wishes to see you. As a matter of fact, he knows nothing whatever about it, and I hope he may never know. You will learn in a very short time why he is so anxious to meet you, and when you have learned I think you will be at one with us in keeping from him the knowledge of Vernon Shapland's wrong-doing."

A puzzled look came on the young man's face, but he asked no further questions, and the two ladies emerging from the house at that moment, the whole party were soon in the car moving towards the Manor. About both ladies there was an air of suppressed excitement that Rowley did not fail

to notice, and as they moved towards their destination he remarked on it jestingly.

"There appears to be something mysterious about this visit. I wonder why I should be kept in ignorance. It is hardly fair."

"The *dénouement* will not be long now," replied Janet, smilingly. "And when it comes I hope it will please you."

"If it please you, I shall be— —"

"Now, Charles, that is a very obvious thing to say," broke in Lady Nancarrow laughingly.

"It is true, all the same," laughed the young man, with a glance at Janet that left her in no doubt whatever.

The car swept through the gates of Shapland, and a few minutes later drew up before the beautiful old house. They were evidently expected, for, as it came to a standstill, a footman came out, and addressed himself to Sir James.

"Sir Charles is in the picture gallery," he said; "he is waiting for you and Mr. Rowley."

The two men stepped out of the car, and as they did so Lady Nancarrow whispered to her husband:

"Don't keep us waiting, or Janet and I will faint with impatience."

Her husband nodded, and together he and Rowley followed the footman into the house, and up the broad staircase which gave on the gallery where hung the portraits of members of the house of Shapland of many generations. When they reached it Sir Charles Shapland moved forward to meet them. His eyes were fixed on the younger man, and Nancarrow saw the light that leaped into them, and the look of gladness which came on his friend's careworn and anxious face. He stepped a little aside as the two came face to face.

"This is Mr. Charles Rowley, Sir Charles."

Sir Charles stretched out his hand quickly, and as the young man took it he was surprised at the warmth of the other's grip. He was also a little surprised that the baronet should continue to hold his hand, but made no attempt to release it. Sir Charles looked at him searchingly, and though he wondered why he should do so, the young man met his gaze frankly.

"You are a very proper man," said Sir Charles, after a moment. "Such a man as a father might be proud to have for a son. Nancarrow, look at that portrait on your left, and tell me what you think?"

Nancarrow swung round. The portrait to which Sir Charles referred was one of himself painted over twenty years before, when he had recently become the master of Shapland. Sir James did not need to look twice. His eyes dwelt on the portrait but for a moment, then their gaze fixed itself upon Charles Rowley, and he drew a long breath.

"I think there can be no doubt," he said, "no doubt whatever!"

Charles Rowley also looked at the portrait, and as he did so a light of wonder came on his face.

"Who is that?" he asked quickly.

"That is Sir Charles as a young man."

"Well," he replied, "I was thinking that it was ridiculously like myself."

"Perhaps there is a very good reason for that!" broke in Sir Charles Shapland. "Such a likeness can scarcely be altogether accidental."

"What do you mean, Sir Charles?" asked the young man, wonderingly.

"I will tell you in a moment," answered the baronet. "But first you must tell me a little about

yourself. Come, sit down. We shall talk easier that way."

They moved towards some chairs, conveniently placed, and when they were seated, Sir Charles addressed himself to the young man.

"I want you to be quite frank with me, and to answer freely any questions that I may ask you. Believe me, I am moved by something more than curiosity. Can you tell me where you were born?"

Charles Rowley shook his head.

"That is impossible," he replied candidly. "I do not even know who my father and mother were, or even whether they are still alive. The man whom I called my father was not really so, though he did all for me that a father could have done. Twenty-three years ago he found me in Papua in the care of a native woman, and as my people were unknown, he adopted me and brought me up with his own son, and I bear his name."

"Is your adoptive father alive?"

"Unfortunately, no. He was killed down in the islands, and my adoptive mother died shortly afterwards, leaving Jim and me to shift for ourselves."

"Jim? That was your foster-brother, was it not?"

"Yes. He was killed——" The young man checked himself as he caught the expression on Sir James Nancarrow's face, and remembering his friend's statement that Sir Charles knew nothing of his nephew's guilt, he refrained from enlarging on the bare statement of fact.

As the young man broke off his statement Sir Charles nodded sympathetically.

"I have heard of that. Poor Vernon told me of



it, and I can understand you do not wish to talk of so painful a subject."

He paused a little and then continued: "So there is no one who can tell anything further about your discovery and adoption by Mr. Rowley."

"No one, so far as I know, Sir Charles."

For a moment Sir Charles Shapland did not speak, then he asked slowly: "Have you any recollection of the days before your adoption by the Rowleys? You must have been very young then, I know, but sometimes things remain in the memories of the young. I myself can remember incidents that occurred when I was no more than three years old."

A thoughtful look came on Charles Rowley's face.

"There is something, but it is very vague, and whether it is a dream or a misty memory of a real occurrence I have never been quite sure, because with me it is a persistent form of absurd nightmare, which I have suffered from since childhood."

"What is it?" asked Sir Charles eagerly. "Tell me. Never mind if it does seem absurd to you."

"It is never very clear," replied the other quietly, "but always when it comes I am filled with fear, a thing I do not know in my waking life, and I have been in many tight corners at various times. When the dream occurs I am always young, you understand, and I am crouching with some one in a bush close to the sea. The person I am with is a white woman, whose face I can never see, and sometimes my face is hidden in her lap. There are canoes on the shore—the nightmare most often begins there, though there are other times when I seem to have been watching them coming across the sea—and there is a crowd of blacks, a war party, searching among the bushes for us and shrieking horribly.

Usually I wake at that point in a sweat of terror, and then I laugh to myself, for I have fought with such parties more than once, and have never been afraid of them. Indeed I have often been surprised at a sort of revengeful passion which has come upon me on these occasions, because after all the blacks are savages and are only following their instincts."

"And does your dream or nightmare never go beyond that point?" asked Sir Charles in a hollow voice. His face was haggard, the sweat stood upon his brow, and there was a light of horror in his eyes. Nancarrow, looking at him, understood that he was listening to the confirmation of the thought which had come to him when he stood by those desolate huts in the far Pacific a quarter of a century before; and he also waited anxiously for the young man's answer.

"Sometimes. There are occasions when the blacks find us, when the woman whose face I never see tries to run away, dragging me by the hand. But we never escape. A tall savage hits the woman with a war-club, and all that I ever remember afterwards is crouching in a canoe, beside a black woman whom I seem to know, whilst the white woman lies in the bottom of the canoe, dead."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" cried Sir Charles. Both Rowley and Sir James looked their astonishment. There was still a light of horror in Sir Charles's eyes, but his face showed a dawning of relief.

"You do not understand why I should say that," he said. "Boy, your nightmare is a shadow of reality. That woman was your mother, and for over twenty years I have prayed to know what you have told me—to know that she died in that terrible hour, and did not live to drag out an exist-

ence that would have been worse than the worst death men could devise. That woman was your mother and my wife. You are my son!"

"Your son!"

Charles Rowley's face expressed amazement, and something more than amazement, as he looked from Sir Charles to the portrait on the wall.

"I understand," he said slowly. "The likeness! It is not accidental! And yet, and yet——"

"There is no question of it," said Sir Charles quickly. "Do you remember when you lost that toe of your left foot?"

"No," cried the young man quickly. "But how did you know? I have never told any one."

"Because I held you in my arms whilst the missionary doctor amputated it. You are my own flesh and blood, and I thank God that after all these years He has given you back to me. You must come to me. You must stay here. You must take your rightful place as the heir of Shapland. I am growing older, and my health is not good, but your coming will be a great comfort. My boy—my own boy!"

The baronet moved towards the man who unquestionably was his long-lost son, his hands outstretched, his face alight with eagerness, his eyes shining with tears. Nancarrow saw him, and turned his eyes away, but a moment later his ears caught the young man's answer.

"Yes—father, I will stay."

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A few moments later, when the first rush of emotion had passed, Nancarrow asked a question which had been troubling him for some days.

"But how about the legal position, Sir Charles?"

Proofs will be wanted before Charles here can assume his position as your heir."

"I think there will be no difficulty about that, Nancarrow," replied Sir Charles. "When I came back to England to assume the title and the estates I wrote out a statement of all that had happened so far as I knew, described the marks my son carried and swore to it before a commissioner of oaths. Then I sealed it up with my marriage certificate, and with this boy's baptismal certificate, and deposited it at the family lawyer's. I fancy that, with this portrait, will be sufficient, whilst there is no one likely to contest the claim. The death of poor Vernon has made things much simpler."

"Yes," agreed Sir James, "it has certainly made things much simpler." He turned towards Charles Rowley.

"You will like to take the news," he said. "My wife and Janet will be growing impatient."

The young man looked towards Sir Charles.

"If you will excuse me—father.." There was a slight hesitation before the last word, which Sir Charles noticed and smiled at, but there was no hesitation about his own answer.

"Certainly, my boy."

## CHAPTER XXX

### AT HOME

ON the terrace, Lady Nancarrow walked to and fro with Janet.

"It would be very dreadful for Sir Charles if we should happen to have made a mistake," she said, breaking a silence that she found difficult.