

a full minute he stood staring into vacancy, then as a thought occurred to him a fierce light glowed in his eyes.

"By heavens, yes! That's the way!" he whispered, and hurried from the room.

A moment later he returned, dressed in a cap and ulster, and going to a desk took something from a drawer and thrust it into his ulster pocket. Then once more he extinguished the light, opened the window, and as he stepped outside, dragged it to after him. He listened for an instant, then started to run on the grass, following the direction that Cordery had taken.

## CHAPTER XVI

### MURDER

ON the day following his interview with Cordery, Vernon Shapland rode over to the Abbey to interview Mr. Selby on a matter that he had carefully thought out during a sleepless night. As he approached the gates an automobile with two men in it swung out and glided down the road in the direction that he himself was travelling. Though the gates were a hundred yards away he recognized the occupants of the car for Sir James Nancarrow and Charles Rowley, and as he did so a frown came on his face, and he wondered to himself what they had been doing at the Abbey.

The frown was still on his face as he rode up to the house, but it cleared as he saw Mr. Selby and his wife talking to each other on the steps.

"Hallo, Vernon," cried Mr. Selby in cheerful

greeting, then broke off. "By Jove, you're looking bad, my boy. Nothing serious, I hope?"

Shapland smiled wanly.

"I'm badly run down," he said, "and need a change. That's why I am here this morning. When I was in town last week I saw Gaythorn, of Harley Street, and he said it was the effects of the New Guinea trip, and he urged me to spend a few weeks in the south of Europe. I should have gone then but for the fact that Janet and I are to be married in the course of a few weeks, and this morning when I telephoned him he urged it again, and said that medicine would do no good. So I have been wondering whether the marriage could be hastened at all. I could get away sooner then and escape the November fogs."

Mr. Selby smiled, but was entirely sympathetic.

"You certainly look as if a change would do you good, and as far as I am concerned I have not the slightest objection to the marriage being hastened. But, of course, it depends upon the women." He turned to his wife. "What do you say, Mary?"

"I daresay it could be arranged, say in a fortnight," answered Mrs. Selby, smilingly, "but certainly no earlier. You men never seem to realize what a lot a girl has to do before she can be married."

"A fortnight is better than six weeks, at any rate," answered the young man.

"Then go and find Janet," laughed Mr. Selby; "she's out with the dogs somewhere in the grounds. If you can persuade her, as I have no doubt you will, it will be all right. We mustn't let you stick round here too long when Gaythorn advises you to get away."

Before the young man could reply, an open car came round the house and drew up by the steps. Mr. Selby looked at his watch.

"I can't wait to hear what Janet decides. I've to catch the next train to town. Just had Nancarrow and Rowley here. I'm joining the board of the new company they're forming. It's going to be a big thing, and there's a meeting this afternoon, so I must be off. But, of course, my wife will do what's needed."

He kissed his wife, stepped into the car, and drove away. Mrs. Selby, whose desire in life was to see her daughter mistress of Shapland, looked at the young man with smiling eyes.

"Jenkins will see to your horse. You had better go and find Janet," she said simply. "She was at the far end of the big paddock ten minutes ago. When you have found her and talked over the matter, you can come and tell me what is decided."

"Thank you, Mrs. Selby," answered the young man, and immediately departed in the direction indicated. It took him five minutes to find Janet. She had left the paddock, and was standing by a spinney on the edge of the grounds watching a couple of dogs nosing in the undergrowth. She turned at his step, and an odd look came on her face as she saw him. Vernon Shapland saw that look, and knew instinctively that the task before him would not prove an easy one. Nevertheless, after formal greetings he began his statement directly, offering the explanation that he had given to her parents and using their consent as an added plea.

"They quite agree, Janet, so there is no good reason why we should not get the business over,

and go away until Christmas. Don't you agree with me?"

The girl shook her head.

"I do not see any need for hurry," she said, with the directness characteristic of her. "I do not see why you should not go away now and let the marriage be postponed. Then when you return a new date can be fixed if we are both in the same mind."

"If we are both in the same mind!" he echoed blankly. "Janet, what on earth do you mean?"

A troubled look came on the girl's face, and for a moment she made no answer; then she said quietly:

"I have wondered lately whether we were not making a mistake."

"A mistake!"

"Yes," was the reply. "I have never been quite sure of myself; and in these last two or three weeks I have been less sure than ever. I have wondered whether I was doing quite the right thing."

Sudden anger flamed through the consternation in Vernon Shapland's face, anger that swept him out of all self-control.

"I understand," he said bitterly. "You do well to mention the last two or three weeks. I have seen a change in you since the fire at the *Mur-land*. It is this man Rowley. You are obsessed by——"

What more he might have said in the heat of his anger may not be written, for at that moment voices sounded on the other side of the spinney, followed by the crash of feet hurrying through the undergrowth. Both turned instinctively, and a few seconds later two men came into view. One of them was a keeper of Mr. Selby's, and the other

was the local constable. Both of them were excited, and as they caught sight of the young people, the constable cried: "Mr. Shapland! Mr. Shapland!"

"Well, Lindsay," asked Shapland, "what is the matter?"

"Matter enough, sir! It's murder, or I'm mistaken."

## CHAPTER XVII

### WHO IS THE MAN?

FOR a moment after Constable Lindsay's announcement there was a dead silence, then Janet ejaculated:

"Murder, Lindsay?"

"Yes, Miss Janet, up in the woods at the top side of the village. He's lying in a clump of ferns on his back with his eyes staring at the tops of the——"

"What on earth are you talking about, Lindsay?"

The interruption came from Vernon Shapland. His voice was harsh and unnatural, and he glared at the garrulous policeman as if what he were saying was a personal affront. But the constable was not affected by his manner. He was young, a new recruit in the county force, and as this was the first time that anything more serious than the arrest of a poacher had come his way he was disposed to make the most of it.

"I'm talking about a dead man who's lying in the woods above the village. He's been murdered,