

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,

or something like it. There's blood on his waist-coat an' shirt, an' on the dried fern where it has run down, an' there's a wound just above where his heart should be. He's as dead as a coffin nail, and stiff as if he'd been lying there for hours. I tell you, when Keeper Barnes here took me to see the body it gave me quite a turn, it did——”

Shapland turned from the policeman to the keeper.

“ Did you find this dead man, Barnes ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” answered the keeper, “ half an hour back. I was going through the wood, when on the grass by the path I noticed some half-dried blood. Then I saw that some of the dried bracken was broken down as if something heavy had been dragged along, and wondering what it meant I went to look, thinking that maybe somebody had been after the pheasants or the rabbits and had dragged a sack through. Then I came plump on the top of the man lying on his back, with his eyes wide open. I had only to look once at those eyes to know that the man was dead ; an' since a man lying dead in a wood means business for the law, I went and fetched Lindsay here, and he's telephoned for the inspector at Marton. We are just going to tell Mr. Selby, who is a magistrate.”

“ Mr. Selby has gone to London,” answered Shapland. “ You won't be able to see him. But who is the man whom you think has been murdered ? Do either of you know him ? ”

“ He is a stranger in the neighbourhood,” answered the constable quickly, “ but he was hanging about all day yesterday, and had taken a bed at the *Shapland Arms*. He was in the tap-room last night talking rather big about a fortune that was coming to him from some one in this neighbourhood.”

"Did he mention any names?" broke in Vernon Shapland quickly.

"No, sir, not that I know of. But Barnes was there, and heard him, and maybe he can tell you more than I can."

"I never heard him give any name, sir, though when somebody mentioned the young gentleman who is staying with Sir James Nancarrow, he said that he'd known him when he wasn't what he was now, and that he could remember the time when he hadn't a cent to his name. He'd lived rough according to his own telling, and his talk was about foreign lands, an' cannibals, an' he said that in New Guinea where——"

"New Guinea?"

This time the interruption came from Janet, and when Shapland turned to her he saw that her face bore a startled look.

"Yes, Miss Selby," answered the keeper. "New Guinea was the place he mentioned, and by his account it is as wild as a menagerie. He seemed to have a bit of a grudge against the young gentlemen at Sir James's, and Blenkin, who was following the hunters yesterday, says that he heard the young gentleman speak rather sharply to him, an' threaten him with his whip. Mr. Rowley, that's the gentleman's name, was talking to you at the time, or so Blenkin says."

The girl's face had suddenly grown very pale. She remembered the incident very clearly, and the bearing of it on the crime that had been committed, if crime it was, was not to be evaded. She looked at Vernon Shapland rather helplessly, and he, for his own ends, asked a question.

"Is that so, Janet?"

But Janet was already recovering from her first

shock of surprise and apprehension, and determined suddenly that too much should not be made of that incident, which, as she perceived clearly, might be used to the severe hurt of the man who had saved her life.

"Mr. Rowley certainly spoke rather sharply to a loafer, who seemed to be following me, and he did threaten him with his hunting crop."

"Did he seem to know the man?"

For a moment Janet was in a quandary. For Charles Rowley's sake she would have liked to evade the question, but Vernon was watching her closely, and, besides, half a score of people had heard the young man's identification of the loafer. So she answered simply:

"Yes! He recognized him suddenly, and addressed him by name. He seemed surprised to see him, and asked him what he was doing here. I have forgotten the name he addressed him by. But need we discuss Mr. Rowley further before these men? He can have nothing to do with the murder?"

Vernon Shapland glanced thoughtfully at the policeman, who caught his eye, and as he did so a light of understanding leaped in his own.

"I'm not so sure about that, Miss Janet," said the constable, with a sudden assumption of authority. "It looks to me as if he might have a thunderin' lot to do with it. The dead man admitted in public that he knew this Mr. Rowley long ago, and good evidence—yours for instance—shows that Mr. Rowley knew the man, an' that he'd threatened him with a riding-whip, whilst nobody else in the neighbourhood knows the dead man at all, and men don't kill men they don't know, leastways not in these parts, though they may do in New Guinea."

Vernon Shapland looked at the girl. Her face wore a look of utmost indignation, and it was clear

that the constable was within an ace of suffering from a very tempest of wrath. Hastily he intervened; and though his tone was entirely judicial, the net result was to confirm the constable's suspicion.

"There is no need to be angry, Janet. What Lindsay says does not necessarily mean that Mr. Rowley is the criminal; and I dare say a very simple explanation of the incident of yesterday will be forthcoming. But for all that, the constable's reasoning is quite natural, and for anything we know to the contrary may be quite sound."

"It's as sound as a bell, sir," commented the constable, as he thus found himself supported and encouraged.

"That remains to be proved, Lindsay," answered Shapland in mild rebuke, "and in the meantime it would be as well to refrain from jumping to conclusions. The inspector, when he arrives, may see things in an altogether different light. But I should like to ask you, has any weapon been found?"

"No, sir! There's none near the body, and we haven't had time to search the wood yet."

"A weapon might be a good clue if you could find it."

"Yes. But though we haven't found it yet, there's another clue, a footmark——"

"What?"

The tone in which Vernon Shapland cried the question startled the constable, and more than the constable. Janet also was surprised and a little puzzled by the look on her lover's face. But as Lindsay began to answer the question she turned to him again.

"A footmark, Mr. Shapland. There's a soft place near where the body lies, and somebody——"

whether the murderer or not is not for me to say — has put his foot on it. Barnes here saw it first, and the look on his face when he tumbled on it made me think of a picture of Robinson Crusoe, which I've got in a Sunday school prize at home."

"Have you done anything to preserve the foot-mark?"

It was the keeper who answered.

"Yes, Mr. Shapland. We've propped a piece of flat stone over it with a stick, and the under-keeper, who is watching by the body, is keeping an eye on it, so that nobody will blunder into it before the inspector has seen it. It mayn't be of any importance, but on the other hand it may, sir, and it's as well to be on the safe side."

"Quite so! Quite so!" answered Shapland; then he continued: "It is no good your going to the Abbey, as Mr. Selby has gone to London; if you are wanting a magistrate I should go to Mr. Carpenter's."

"Yes, sir, I will," answered Lindsay.

"And I'll go back and help to keep watch," said Barnes. "Nobody in the vlllage knows the news yet, but if they get wind of it there; they'll flock up in droves."

"I daresay that will be the best thing to do," agreed Shapland, "and if you will wait for me a moment I will go with you."

He turned to Janet and at his suggestion she moved forward a little way. Her face was pale, and there was a look of apprehension in her eyes. He noted these facts and anger surged in his heart; but when he spoke his voice was suave and altogether sympathetic.

"This is a very unfortunate business, Janet,

and I can understand how you must feel about it. Rowley saved your life, and now——”

Janet interrupted. “Yes—and now?”

“Well, there is no need for me to say,” he answered quietly, “fortunately, or you might think that I am prejudiced. But I do wish that it had not occurred, and that none of us had ever heard the name of Rowley.”

“That might have meant misfortune for me,” replied Janet quickly. “But for him——”

“I know. But are you not in danger of making too much of that, Janet? Any other man would have done the same thing; and I—I would die for you, as I will live for you. Just now I spoke hastily. You must forgive me for that foolish suggestion about your being too interested in this man Rowley.”

The blood flamed in the girl's face, and he surprised a look in her eyes that he could not understand. It seemed as if Janet were communing with herself, asking herself some question which she found difficult to answer, and it was a moment before she replied.

“There is no need to refer to that now. Other matters we can discuss later. You are keeping Barnes waiting, and there is something I want to think over quietly. I will go to the house now, and you can call on your way back.”

She whistled to her dogs, and turned away. Shapland stood watching her. There was something enigmatic in her manner which troubled him and filled him with vague forebodings. He watched for a full minute and then joined the keeper, who as they walked to the scene of the crime, found him very silent. After about ten minutes fast walking they entered the wood, and the keeper gave instructions.

"Just here to the left, sir. This is the way where the body was dragged. Please step carefully, Mr. Shapland. The stone over the foot-mark is just— Good Lor' you've done it, sir!"

"Done what?" asked Shapland quickly, as he swung round.

"You've knocked the stone down, sir! You're standing on it at this moment. You'll have squashed that footmark clean out!"

"Great Scot! How very careless of me!" cried Shapland, in a voice that betrayed vexation. "You should have warned me sooner!"

But his face, as he spoke, betrayed none of the vexation in his tones; and the keeper as he stared at the stone was wondering how on earth a man could have missed seeing it.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SUSPICIONS

ON the day following the discovery of the murder there was a dance at the Abbey, an annual function in connexion with the hunt of which Mr. Selby was the master, and to the guests the dead man afforded a topic of interest.

"Never known anything of the sort happen before on this countryside," commented a grizzled squire, who lived six miles from the Abbey. "Was the man known here?"

"A stranger," another man replied. "Came from New Guinea, and had been talking rather big about some money that was to come to him."

"New Guinea," said the squire. "Isn't that