

"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

the place where that young fellow up at Nancarrow's comes from?"

"Yes," answered a third man, "and the queer thing is that Nancarrow's guest knew the murdered man. He recognized him during the run yesterday, and threatened him with his hunting crop. I was standing by and saw the whole business, and heard the dead man tell Rowley that he'd be sorry for it some day."

The squire whistled softly to himself, then looked at the other meaningly.

"It sounds bad," he commented. "Does Jimmy Nancarrow know?"

"Yes. I went out of my way to tell him about it."

"And what did he say?"

"He laughed in my face, and said I didn't know Rowley or I shouldn't hint at such rot. Told me that Rowley was safe in bed when the thing was done, if there was anything in the doctor's evidence."

"How is he to know that?" asked another man quickly. "If a man meant to do a thing like that, he'd naturally prepare an alibi, unless he was a born fool, and after all it would be easy enough for a man to drop down from one of those balconies that adorn Nancarrow's windows."

"There would be the getting back," objected the squire. "A man couldn't very well jump up again."

"No, but supposing he had a rope——"

"Bosh!" broke in the squire rudely. "Whoever heard of a man going as guest to a house with a rope in his portmanteau? You'll have to try again, Gaddy. That Romeo-Juliet business of the balcony won't do. Even Sherlock Holmes could tell you that."

Gaddy laughed. "Oh, I don't pretend to be

able to explain the affair. I only suggested the balcony as a possible way of egress for Rowley, whilst Nancarrow supposed him to be sound asleep. Anyway, if you had seen the dead man and Rowley together the other day, you would have said it was a dashed queer business, and to my mind it seems a thundering sight queerer now."

"Yes," agreed the squire, "it has an odd look. Is Rowley here to-night?"

"Yes, Nancarrow's wife brought him, Nancarrow being detained in town. I saw him not ten minutes back."

"Phew!" whistled the squire, then added, "It's not very nice to think that our womenfolk may be dancing with a murderer."

"That sensation will be denied them, squire," laughed the man Gaddy. "Rowley, I understand, doesn't dance."

"At any rate Lady Nancarrow ought to have known better than to bring a fellow here with a cloud of that sort over him," grumbled the squire. "And Selby ought to have shut the door against him—if he knows about these things."

"Oh, Selby knows, but he's in a bit of a fix. You see Rowley saved his daughter's life when the *Murland* was burned down; and it is not very easy for him to take a strong line like that until he's surer about the facts than he is at present."

"Yes, that does put him in a hole," agreed the squire. "All the same——"

"Excuse me," broke in a voice, "but have any of you gentlemen seen Mr. Selby?"

The speaker was Jarlow, Mr. Selby's butler, an elderly man, whose usually placid face was creased with perplexity.

"No, Jarlow," replied the squire. "But what's

up? You look as if you wanted him badly."

"I do, and I can't find him, and there's Constable Lindsay and a sergeant in the servants' hall wanting to see him most particularly about the murder."

"That's what it is to be on the bench," laughed the squire. "But there's Mr. Shapland; perhaps he has seen him."

Vernon Shapland had just entered the door of the smoke-room where the men were conversing, and immediately Jarlow turned to him.

"Excuse me, Mr. Shapland, but have you seen Mr. Selby anywhere about? There's Lindsay and the sergeant in the servants' hall wanting to see him about the murder, and I can't find him. They've found a knife——"

"No," interrupted Vernon Shapland quickly. "I haven't seen him lately. But you're sure to find him. In the meantime I'll go as far as the kitchen and have a word with Lindsay, as I happened to be the first to hear his story about the murder."

"As you please, sir. I——"

But Vernon Shapland had already turned on his heel, and as he made his way down a long corridor there was a worried look on his face. When he entered the servants' hall he found a couple of domestics in excited conversation with the officers, and plainly fascinated by a long hunting knife, slightly rusted and showing stains that were not all due to rust. At the sight of Shapland the two girls retreated, and as the men saluted him, Shapland inquired:

"What is it, sergeant?"

"We've found the weapon with which Cordery was slain, sir," replied the sergeant.

"It was lying in a bush, where it had evidently been thrown," added the constable. "We'd been hunting for it on the ground, and half an hour back, when we'd almost given up hopes of finding it, I went with the sergeant for a last try. My lamp just cut out the middle of the bush and there the knife was in a place where we must have passed it a score of times."

Shapland glanced at the knife, with its grim stains.

"Does it throw any fresh light on the murder?" he asked carelessly.

"Well, that all depends, sir. There's a clue of sorts, for there's a name on the blade—I mean the ordinary trade stamp. Where's Port Moresby, sir?"

"In New Guinea!"

"New Guinea!" ejaculated the sergeant, glancing quickly at his subordinate. "Then that clinches it!"

"What do you mean, sergeant?" asked Shapland.

"Mean, sir, I mean that whoever had this knife came from New Guinea where it was made——"

"Hardly, that, sergeant," interrupted Shapland smilingly. "Port Moresby's not a manufacturing centre. If that knife has a Port Moresby's trade stamp on it, it is probably the name of the store that supplied it, rather than that of the firm who made it. Probably it was made in Sheffield and——"

"That makes no difference, sir. The knife was bought in New Guinea; the one man in this neighbourhood who knew this murdered Cordery comes from New Guinea, and within a few hours of the crime the two met and had had words. It's as plain as a pikestaff."

Vernon Shapland looked thoughtful.

"It certainly looks black against Mr. Rowley."

"Black—it's as black as black can be. Anyway, as soon as I have seen Mr. Selby, I shall have to arrest Mr. Rowley on suspicion. They tell me he is here at the Abbey, sir."

Vernon Shapland nodded. "Yes! But surely you don't mean to arrest him here, sergeant? Won't it be best to wait until he gets back to Sir James's, and then do what you have to do?"

A stubborn look came on the sergeant's face.

"No, sir. Suppose he were to get wind of what I am up to? He would run away, as like as not! That's a risk I can't take, Mr. Shapland. When Mr. Selby comes I'll get him to bring Mr. Rowley here, and then make the arrest. That's the only way."

"Well, of course, you know your own business best, sergeant, and it is not for me to dictate to you."

As he spoke Vernon Shapland turned towards the door. "I'll see if I can find Mr. Selby. If this business is to be done, the sooner you get it over the better."

"Yes, sir."

Shapland left the servants' hall, and made his way back to the ball-room. But instead of looking for Mr. Selby he made his way to Janet, who was talking to Lady Nancarrow. The girl looked up as he approached her, and something in his demeanour awakened a sudden premonition of coming ill. She made an excuse to her companion, who smiled as she caught sight of Shapland, then she moved towards him.

"Janet," he said, "come out on the terrace a moment. I want to speak to you privately."

The girl made no demur whatever, but walked by his side unquestioningly, staying but a moment in the hall to throw a coat over her shoulders. They found the terrace deserted, and instantly she turned and faced him.

"What is the matter?" she asked breathlessly.

"It is something very serious," was the reply. "Something that will distress you to hear. I am afraid, Janet, that you must prepare yourself for a great shock."

"Tell me," she said quickly.

"It is about Rowley," he explained. "There is trouble in store for him."

"Trouble?" she echoed, and her voice quivered as she spoke. "What trouble can there be for him, that you should come to tell me of it?"

In her heart she already guessed, but to Vernon Shapland she gave no sign of having done so, but waited for his further explanation.

"It is about that man, Cordery," he continued. "The police have found the weapon with which the crime was committed, and no one who knows all the facts can question that it belonged to Rowley. It is evidence of a very conclusive sort, and Lindsay and the sergeant are here looking for your father. They did not say what they wanted, but I can guess that they have come to obtain a warrant."

"A warrant," she gasped. "Do you mean that they are going to arrest Mr. Rowley?"

"I am afraid there is no doubt of that! The sergeant means to do it here and now. I suggested that he should wait until Rowley got back to Nancarrow's, but he wouldn't hear of it. He is afraid that Rowley may get to know his purpose, and escape him, after all."

"Oh," cried the girl in distress, "I must go to him. I must tell him——"

"To whom must you go?" broke in her lover harshly. "To the sergèant? I assure you that it is no——"

"No. I must go to Mr. Rowley. I must speak to him, warn him. They must not take him by surprise. That would be too terrible. He must be told by a friend. Warned! I must go at once.

CHAPTER XIX

A WARNING

AS Janet Selby announced her intention of going to Charles Rowley to warn him of his impending arrest, her lover laid a restraining hand upon her arm.

"But you can't do that, Janet," he protested quickly. "People will notice you—they will talk. You know what they will say."

"Let them say," she retorted sharply. "I do not care. This man saved my life at the risk of his own, and I am not an ingrate."

"But he killed this man Cordery," said Shapland harshly. "He is a murderer, of that there can be no question whatever. The less you have to do with him the better. He——"

"I do not believe what you say, Vernon," the girl replied vehemently. "You do not like Mr. Rowley, and you are prejudiced, but I am quite sure that he is incapable of doing a thing so foul. He is high-minded. He is brave and chivalrous; and he only spoke to this Cordery because the man