DEATH AT LOW TIDE

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DEATH AT LOW TIDE

A **CRIME CLUB** *Novel*

A Crime Club Detective Story

The old ferryman had caught many strange fish in his time, but none so strange as the body he fished out of the harbour one summer evening as the tide was on the turn. To his horror he saw at once that it was Captain Stanlake, the local harbour master. In the few months that Captain Stanlake had been harbour master at Brenthithe he had made himself a confounded nuisance to everyone. That was perhaps not his fault, but was mainly due to his keen desire to make Brenthithe an industrial port rather than a seaside resort. He had made many enemies in this local feud, but would anyone go as far as murder—for foul play it certainly was. *Death at Low Tide* is an enthralling mystery with an attractive setting and an absorbing plot.

By the Same Author

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DEATH AT THE CLUB
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THE MILK CHURN MURDER
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DEATH OF MR. GANTLEY
THE MENACE ON THE DOWNS
THREE CRIMES
HARDWAY DIAMONDS MYSTERY
THE SECRET OF HIGH ELDERSHAM
TO CATCH A THIEF
THE CHARABANC MYSTERY

DEATH AT LOW TIDE

by

MILES BURTON

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE "FULMAR" SAILS

MRS. FRIMLEY glanced at the clock fixed above the desk in her husband's cabin and sighed.

"Ten minutes past eleven!" she said. "I mustn't stay any longer. The ferry stops working at half-past, and I don't want to have to go all the way round by Brent Royal. What time do you sail?"

"As soon as there's water enough," her husband replied. "It's high water at 1.47 a.m. summer time. I've given orders for the men to stand by at a quarter to one."

Mrs. Frimley stood up and put on her hat. "Even after all this time I still hate sailing day," she said. "You'll try and get in an hour's shut-eye before one o'clock, won't you?"

"Trust me for that," her husband replied. "And I don't suppose you hate sailing day half as much as I do."

She smiled at him in the looking-glass. A very charming smile it was, disclosing a row of white teeth between a remarkably pretty pair of lips. Carrie Frimley had developed from rather a gawkish girl to a strikingly handsome woman. Her husband, who adored her, watched her graceful movements with unconcealed admiration. Abruptly he stood up and put his arms round her. "You're looking lovelier than ever this evening," he murmured.

"Perhaps there's a reason for that," she replied mysteriously. Then with her mouth close to his ear, she added, "It's going to be a boy this time."

For an instant he stared at her speechless. Then: "Carrie!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean!——"

She nodded vigorously. "That's just what I do mean," she replied. "There isn't a shadow of doubt about it. I didn't tell you before this in case you panicked about it. Now you'll have several days in which to get used to the idea before you see me again."

"Panicked!" exclaimed Captain Frimley. "I certainly shouldn't have let you wait on me hand and foot as you have done these last few days."

"Well, now I'm going to have a quiet rest," she replied. "Come along, my dear. Much as I hate parting from you I mustn't lose that last ferry."

He opened the cabin door and they stepped out on to the deserted deck.

"My word, it's dark!" Mrs. Frimley exclaimed, pausing on the threshold.

"So it is," her husband agreed. "It's clouded over since we came aboard. Hold on a minute while I get my torch."

With the aid of the torch they reached the gangway down which they passed to the wharf. This, like the deck of the *Fulmar*, was utterly deserted. A few scattered electric lamp standards revealed a dusty quayside and the gaunt outline of an old-fashioned crane. They picked their way carefully along the quayside between the silent warehouses on their right and the dark water of the harbour on their left. Thus they reached a railed-off enclosure on the surface of which was painted in giant white letters the words, "Park Here." A small saloon car stood here and Captain Frimley helped his wife into it.

"You'll take care of yourself?" he said anxiously.

"Trust me for that," she replied. "Now, off you go. You've time for a good hour on the settee before you sail."

But still he lingered. "I hate to think of your being alone this next week," he said. "You'll ask people round to see you, won't you? There's May Leyland, for instance. She'd always come round and keep you company for an hour or so."

She smiled at him half-pityingly. "Perhaps it's a good thing you men are as blind as you are," she replied. "I don't think I shall trouble May Leyland much. She's got other fish to fry just now. Now you must really let me go, my dear. Take care of yourself and come back as soon as you can."

She drove off, and Captain Frimley watched the tail-light of the car until it disappeared round the corner. Then he turned and began to walk slowly back towards his ship, absorbed in his own thoughts. So Carrie was going to have another baby? Well, it was to be hoped that she was right and that it would be a boy this time. Two girls were very nice in their way and nobody could want a nicer pair of kids. But a boy, now! That would give quite a fresh interest to life. There's be money enough to give him a decent education. . . .

Captain Frimley pulled up abruptly as a bellowing voice accosted him from the dark shadow of the warehouses.

"Hallo, Frimley! Stretching your legs a bit ashore before you sail, eh?"

The owner of the voice emerged from the shadows into the light of one of the lamp standards. He was of middle height, grey-haired and clean-shaven and his powerful muscular body was enclosed in a tight-fitting blue uniform suit. This was Captain Robert Stanlake, the Brenthithe Harbour Master.

"Hallo, good evening," Frimley replied absently. "It's late for you to be prowling about, isn't it?"

"No good trying to sleep on a night like this," Stanlake said. "Phew! Why, one can hardly breathe. It's like being out East without the fans going."

"We often get weather like this here in August," Frimley replied. "You'll get used to it when you've lived here for a few years. But I'm bound to say that it's come on very heavy and oppressive since sun-down."

"It'll thunder before long, you mark my words," said the other. "I thought I saw a flash in the distance as I came down High Street just now. Maybe that'll clear the air a bit. I was down here this afternoon when your chaps were putting the hatches on. You're loaded pretty well down to your marks, I see. What are you drawing?"

"Fourteen feet six aft and nine inches or so less forrard," Frimley replied.

"Then it's no good your trying to get away much before one o'clock," declared Stanlake positively.

"I didn't propose to," Frimley replied with a touch of asperity. "I know the harbour pretty well by this time."

Stanlake snorted derisively. "Just like all you Brenthithe chaps!" he exclaimed. "You say you know your harbour, and you let it silt up under your very eyes like a farmer's ditch. One of these days you'll find that you're neaped for the best part of a week. And what will you say then, I should like to know?"

Confound the man, thought Frimley. "I'll tell you that when it happens," he replied. "It's time I was getting aboard now."

Stanlake completely ignored the hint. “I’ll come along with you,” he said with rude heartiness. “There’ll be more air on your deck than there is on this confounded quayside. I dare say you’ll be glad of some one to keep you company for a bit.”

Captain Frimley had no desire for the company of anyone, least of all the Harbour Master. However, he couldn’t very well tell him to go to hell. “Come aboard if you want to,” he said curtly.

Stanlake, in no way rebuffed by the frigidity of the invitation, followed Frimley to his cabin. He dropped heavily upon the settee, grunted disconsolately and threw his cap upon the desk. Seen in the glare of the cabin lamp, his appearance was not altogether prepossessing. His powerful rough-hewn features gave him an overbearing expression, emphasised by the sinister line of a scar which ran across his left cheek from the eye to the jawbone. He glanced round the cabin complacently.

“Not too bad for an old tub of a coaster like this,” he said. “But of course, it wouldn’t do for an ocean-going ship. You should have seen the accommodation we had in the Monk Line. Why, all the officers had cabins three times as big as this.”

Captain Frimley’s patience was already strained to the limit. He had never liked Stanlake, who had been appointed Harbour Master at Brenthithe less than a year ago and had already made himself a confounded nuisance to everybody. The neat, well-ordered cabin was a source of secret pride to Frimley, who had spent much time and thought in fitting it to his own particular taste. And now to see this patronising bounder sitting on the settee, still warm from the impress of Carrie’s delicious body, was more than he could bear.

“Oh, yes, of course, the Monk Line,” he replied, controlling himself with difficulty. “Your last berth with them was as first officer in the *Cistercian*, wasn’t it, *Mister* Stanlake?”

Stanlake’s face flushed until the scar upon his left cheek showed as a livid streak upon an angry background. “That’s right, *sir*,” he replied, and the emphasis on the “sir” put to shame the offensiveness which Frimley had laid upon his “mister.” “But I’m Captain Stanlake in Brenthithe, for all that, and I dare say I passed for extra master before you were out of your apprenticeship. However, we won’t quarrel about that. You’ve got an anchor out on the starboard bow, I suppose?”

“No, I haven’t,” said Frimley curtly. “There’s no necessity for it. I can get away all right without an anchor to help me.”

"Oh, I dare say you've learnt more seamanship in ten years that I have in forty," the other sneered. "You can get away all right, you say. I dare say you can on a night like this, when there's not a breath stirring. But what if it came to blow hard from the westward and jammed you against the quay? What would you do then?"

"What's your boatman for?" Frimley countered quickly. "He'd have to run a line for me to the west jetty and I'd haul myself off by that."

"My boatman!" Stanlake exclaimed. "Do you think I'm going to pay a boatman overtime just because shipmasters are too damned lazy and independent to carry out instructions? You know perfectly well that for the last six months, there's been an instruction about dropping an anchor before picking up a berth."

Captain Frimley was well aware of the regulation. He also knew, though he would never have admitted the fact, that it was based upon sound common sense. But just because it had been issued by a man whom he disliked, he always made a point of ignoring it.

"We got on well enough here in old Captain Robinson's days without all these tomfool regulations," he said sullenly.

Stanlake glared at him for a second or two, then burst into derisive laughter. "Heaven defend me from you Brenthithe folk!" he exclaimed. "You're like a flock of sheep following one another blindly without looking to see where they're going. You think you've got on well enough, and you won't see where the road's led you to. For years you've neglected one of the finest harbours in the west of England until now it isn't fit to accommodate anything bigger than a Dutch coaster. And upon my word, I believe some of you are rather proud of the fact."

Frimley shrugged his shoulders. "So far as I can see the port deals well enough with all the trade that comes to it," he said.

"At that rate, you'll be able to do without a port altogether in a few years," replied the other quickly. "For, if something isn't done about it, by that time there'll be no trade at all coming to Brenthithe." He got up suddenly and stood over Frimley as though to enforce his argument by the very massiveness of his presence. "Dash it all, man, you're a sailor," he boomed. "Not like the members of your precious Harbour Commission who don't know a warp from a clothes-line. Can't you see for yourself the opportunities that are being wasted in this place? It wouldn't take more than five years at the most to turn Brenthithe into a first-class port."

"I dare say it wouldn't," Frimley snapped irritably. "But where's the shipping coming from to use it?"

"Provide the facilities and the shipowners will be quick enough to make use of them!" exclaimed the other confidently. "What makes you Brenthithe folk so dense, I wonder? Perhaps it's the climate. A night like this is enough to smother anybody's energy."

"It doesn't seem to put a damper on you anyway," Frimley retorted. "It hasn't occurred to you perhaps that I might be glad of half an hour's rest before taking my ship out?"

"Sorry, it hadn't occurred to me," replied Stanlake ironically. "Of course the responsibility of handling a ship of this size must be enormous. Well I'll be going."

He stood a step towards the cabin door, then stopped. "What bug's bitten that Chief of yours?" he asked abruptly.

"Leyland, you mean?" replied Frimley. "Nothing that I know of. He was all right when I last saw him a few minutes ago."

"Then he might have the common civility to answer when he's spoken to," Stanlake growled. Again he turned to the cabin door and this time wrenched it open with a twist of his powerful wrist. He stalked out into the blackness of the night with Frimley following at his heels. But not until he had slumped down the gangway on to the quay was any further word exchanged between them. It was the Harbour Master who spoke, in a voice that would have drowned the foghorn on the west jetty.

"Next time you come in, Captain Frimley, see that you drop an anchor in the channel before you swing," he blared.

"Oh, to hell with you and your damned anchors!" Frimley replied, stung beyond endurance. But it was doubtful whether Stanlake so much as heard him. He strode off along the quayside until his bulky form was lost in the dark shadows of the warehouse.

Frimley stood at the rail watching his departure, until a chuckle at his elbow caused him to spin swiftly on his heel. "Hallo, Chief, you there!" he exclaimed.

A tall lank form clad in dungarees open at the chest appeared in such faint light as reached the ship from the scattered lamps ashore. This was Amyas Leyland, the chief engineer of the *Fulmar*, of whom it was said that

he divided his attention with perfect impartiality between his engine-room and his wife.

"Yes, I've been smoking my pipe under the lee of the engine-room hatch this last half-hour," he replied. "Pretty mannered little gentleman, isn't he?"

"Who, Stanlake?" said Frimley. "He's an ill-mannered swine, that's what he is. Came aboard just now without a please or by-your-leave, and talked to me in my own cabin as if I'd been so much dirt. For tuppence I would have thrown him overboard. But what have you been doing to ruffle him?"

Leyland glanced swiftly at the captain. "Ruffle him?" he demanded. "I don't know that I've done anything to ruffle him as yet. Why?"

"He said something to me just now about you not having answered him when he spoke to you."

"Oh, is that all!" said Leyland, laughing shortly. "I think I know what he means. I happened to meet him when I was coming down High Street this afternoon and pretended not to see him. When he hailed me I didn't answer. The plain truth is that I can't abide the man."

"No more can I. He's an offensive brute, and that's all about it. I can't think how the Harbour Commissioners have put up with him as long as they have."

"They don't know him like we do, I suppose. Well, we shan't see him again for the next few days, that's one comfort. I've got steam up as soon as you're ready for it."

"It's only a quarter-past twelve shore time," Frimley replied. "I shan't cast off until one, and there'll be precious little water under her keel even then. So you've time for half an hour's caulk before you need tinker with your ironmongery."

Frimley turned away, re-entered his cabin and lay down on his settee. It took him a few minutes to recover from the annoyance which Stanlake's visit had caused him. Then his thoughts turned into more pleasant channels. Carrie and the gratifying though somewhat disturbing news she had brought him. The visions of the future which he began to build gradually faded into incoherence.

Half an hour later he was roused by a tap on the door. At his reply the steward entered, bearing a cup of tea. "It's a quarter to one, sir," the steward reported, as he placed the cup on the desk.

"Right," said Frimley. "You've called the officers, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," the steward replied. Then at a nod from the Captain he left the cabin.

Frimley gulped down his tea with that disregard of boiling liquids which seems inherent in all sailormen. Then he went up on to the bridge and looked about him. The night seemed darker than ever. Out to seawards the sky was as a pall of black velvet with never a star showing through. The lamp standards on the quayside seemed hardly able to pierce the darkness, and on the farther side of the harbour, the red light at the end of the west jetty winked ineffectually. Beyond the red light were the street lamps of the new town, built tier upon tier up the slopes of Bollard Head. To the northward, far away inland, a faint flash of lightning quivered for an instant and vanished.

Frimley filled his pipe, then struck a match. So still it was that the match burnt without a flicker. It seemed to Frimley that the universe had plunged into the mysterious silence of a dreamless sleep, for the sounds that came to him on the bridge were so familiar that he scarcely heard them. The deep rumbling of the boilers, the purr of the ship's dynamo, the musical plash of the condenser water pouring overside, an occasional soft sigh from the escape pipe alongside the funnel. And then suddenly a shuffle on the iron deck, a clatter of footsteps up the bridge ladder and a seaman appeared. He touched his cap awkwardly, then at a nod from the Captain went into the chart-house and switched on the navigation lights. This done, he took his place at the wheel, leaning negligently against the spokes, his jaws moving in a ceaseless chewing. Not tobacco, but gum in these degenerate days.

As though the switching on of the lights had been, a signal, the *Fulmar* awoke. From down below in the stokehold came a tremendous clattering of shovels. The first officer clambered on to the fo'castle with a couple of hands following him. On the poop, the second officer let the steam into one of his winches, which burst into activity with an ear-splitting rattle. The noise lasted for half a minute or so, then subsided as quickly as it had begun.

Captain Frimley glanced through the chartroom door. The hand of the clock pointed exactly to one o'clock. "All ready forrard?" he called.

The voice of the first officer answered him. "All ready, sir."

"All ready aft?"

"All ready, sir," answered the second officer.

Captain Frimley put his hand on the telegram and rang "Stand by."

A moment later the answering clang told him that the engine-room had received the message.

"Starboard a bit," he said to the helmsman.

"Starboard, sir," the man replied impassively.

He swung the wheel round and the chains rattled in their housings.

"Slack away forrard," Frimley called out, and as the answer, "Slack away, sir," came back to him, "I'll show that pompous ass that I can get away without using an anchor or any nonsense like that," he thought.

The process of getting away was, in fact, simplicity itself. The *Fulmar* was lying with her head to seaward and her port side made fast. The last of the flood tide was still running gently up the harbour. As the foremost hawser was slackened the flow of water gradually carried the *Fulmar's* bows away from the quayside.

Frimley waited until a gap of a few yards separated them. "Hold on, forrard, slack away aft."

As soon as this manœuvre had had the effect of swinging the ship's stern into the channel, Frimley rang the engines to slow speed ahead. The propeller began to turn, and in a few seconds the *Fulmar* gathered way towards the mouth of the harbour.

"Let go, forrard and aft!" Frimley ordered.

At the answering shouts of the two officers, "Let go ashore there," a dim figure appeared on the quayside. He was one of the harbour men detailed for this particular duty. With rapid and practised hands, he lifted the loops of the hawsers from their bollards and threw them with successive splashes into the water. Fore and aft upon the *Fulmar's* decks the winches rattled, hauling in the slack. Then again they stopped, leaving the silence to be broken only by the rhythmical throb of the main engine.

As the *Fulmar* drew abreast of the end of the west jetty, the winking light there changed from red to white. A second similar light appeared, right away at the head of Bollard Bay. These were the leading lights for entering or leaving the harbour. Just before they came in line, Frimley issued a sharp order, "Hard-a-port."

"Hard-a-port, sir," replied the helmsman, as he swung the wheel round.

The *Fulmar* listed slightly as she swung round in, obedience to her rudder. Frimley watched the lights until they appeared dead in line bearing

right astern. “Steady.” He waited for a minute or two, for the *Fulmar* was now crossing the shallowest part of the entrance. Had it been daylight, her wake would have been visible as a streak of brown mud stirred up by her propeller. On the starboard hand a dim green light on the parade marked the landing steps of the Brenthithe Yacht Club. Frimley waited until he was abreast of this and then rang full speed ahead. The engines throbbed more rapidly and the *Fulmar* began to gather way. Frimley paced the narrow little bridge, up and down, up and down. He was still smarting from his encounter with the Harbour Master.

“Blasted busybody!” he exclaimed aloud suddenly.

“Sir?” inquired the puzzled helmsman.

“Blasted busybody, I said,” Frimley growled. “Steady as she is.”

“Steady it is, sir.”

A moment later the long-threatened storm burst. At first a few great drops of water pattering upon the iron deck. Then, with a loud swish came a downpour of torrential rain, veiling the lights of Brenthithe astern behind an impenetrable curtain.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN STANLAKE'S LAST DAY

THE *Fulmar* sailed at one o'clock on the morning of Tuesday, August 17th. At eleven o'clock that same morning, Captain Stanlake attended a meeting of the Commissioners of Brenthithe Harbour.

The Commissioners met at this hour on the third Tuesday of every month in the seventeenth century Town Hall at the top of High Street. Before the appointment of Stanlake as Harbour Master, these meetings had been little more than a formality. Old Captain Robinson, his predecessor, who had died in office the previous year at the ripe age of seventy-two, had been an easy-going old chap who believed in letting things take their own course. His monthly report to the Commissioners had occupied at the most ten minutes. As this had usually concluded the business, the meeting then adjourned. The Commissioners dispersed to their various businesses and Captain Robinson returned to his office to doze comfortably in his leather-covered arm-chair.

But Captain Stanlake was a bird of a very different feather. Far from letting things take their own course, he was determined to seize them by the scruff of the neck and make them follow his. His professed ambition was to convert the antiquated and sleepy little harbour into a great commercial port. Ever since his appointment as Harbour Master he had bombarded the Commissioners with schemes designed to this end. And so forceful was his personality that he had almost converted a majority of the Commissioners to his own views.

On this particular morning he sat at the lower end of the council table, burly, red-faced and domineering. The clerk to the Commissioners, a little wizened man with a dried-up face, read the minutes of the last meeting. The chairman signed them, then fixed his eyes rather nervously upon the Harbour Master. "The Commissioners have examined the scheme for the improvement of the harbour recently submitted by you, Captain Stanlake," he said. "We should very much like to hear any further explanations which you may care to make."

Stanlake sighed audibly. Explanations! He had explained his schemes to these dunderheaded fools at least half a dozen times already. By this time, the purport of them was common knowledge. He had been accorded a two-column interview in the pages of the *Brenthithe Messenger*, in the course of which he had laid his cards upon the table for public inspection. That his proposals had aroused a storm of angry opposition did not trouble him a whit. If only he could bring the Commissioners round to his point of view, the objectors might shout themselves hoarse for all he cared.

And now these Commissioners wanted the old explanations all over again. It was exasperating, but it couldn't be helped. Only by dogged perseverance could he hope to get his own way. So, swallowing his indignation, he began to speak as patiently as he could.

"The whole point of the matter is this," he began in a bellowing voice which made the windows of the council chamber rattle in their frames. "If things are allowed to drift as they have been, in a few years' time the harbour will be so silted up as to be practically useless. You gentlemen don't appear to realise the seriousness of the situation. The biggest vessel that uses the port regularly now is the *Fulmar* belonging to the Bollard Steamship Company. And before she's very much older, the company will have to sell her and buy a smaller ship."

Stanlake paused and the chairman looked at him apprehensively. "How is that, Captain?" he asked.

"Because there won't be enough water over the bar to float even a miserable little coaster of eight hundred tons, which is the *Fulmar's* gross measurement," Stanlake thundered. "She went out on this morning's tide drawing a mere fourteen foot six. And I tell you this. If there had been any swell running into the mouth of the harbour, her captain wouldn't have dared sail at all. She'd have bumped her bottom on the bank that's been allowed to accumulate off the end of the west jetty."

"Your suggestions concern the removal of this bank, do they not, Captain?"

Stanlake brought his fist down with a thump upon the table, causing the Commissioners to start nervously in their seats. "Of course they do!" he roared. "Clear away that accumulation of mud and sand for good and all and you've got the finest harbour in the west of England. You'd have twenty foot at low water almost up to Brent Royal, and room for any extensions you might care to make. You could extend the quay and provide berths for half a dozen five thousand ton ships to begin with. Why, there's no limit to what

might be done! For instance, everybody knows that the International Petroleum Company are looking for a site for a central distributing depot. Brenthithe, if the necessary developments were carried out, would be the very place for them. There's plenty of room for a dozen of their tankers to lie above the ferry. In fact, there's no reason at all why Brenthithe shouldn't be made the biggest commercial port between Land's End and Southampton."

The chairman took advantage of a pause in Stanlake's eloquence. "It's very gratifying to hear you say that, Captain," he said. "The first step, I gather, is the removal of this bank you speak of?"

"That's obvious," Stanlake replied. "That bank's got to be got rid of at once before it's too late. And it's no good talking about dredging. Dredging won't stop a bank forming. The most you can hope for is that it will clear it away as fast as it accumulates. You've got to keep your dredger working continually, and a very expensive business it is.

"Fortunately, in this case the dredger isn't necessary, as my scheme explains. I'll try once more to make the matter quite plain. Brenthithe harbour is nothing more nor less than the mouth of the River Brent. Between the quay and the west jetty the river is very narrow, but above the ferry it widens out into a lake covering several square miles.

"Now, as things are to-day, what happens? The river is perpetually bringing down silt off the land into this lake. As the tide falls this lake discharges into the sea, bringing the silt with it. The ebb current has sufficient force to carry the silt in suspension through the harbour. But, at the end of the west jetty, this current meets the sea and its velocity is suddenly checked. The result is that the silt falls to the bottom and forms the bank which is the cause of all the trouble."

The Chairman nodded. "That is perfectly clear, Captain," he said. "You believe it would be possible to prevent this silt being deposited?"

"I don't believe it, I know it," Stanlake replied confidently. "All you've got to do is to continue the velocity of the ebb stream until it reaches deep water. To do that you've got to extend the west jetty right across the mouth of Bollard Bay until it joins the shore again somewhere about the Yacht Club steps. It might be necessary to build a short training wall on the eastern side of the harbour, but that would be a trifle. That would carry the silt right out to sea, where it would have plenty of room to fall without affecting the depth to any extent. I don't ask you to take my word for it. Get any consulting engineer down here and he'll tell you the same."

"I'm sure you're right, Captain," said the Chairman hastily. "But surely, by extending the jetty to the Yacht Club steps, you would cut Bollard Bay off from the sea entirely?"

"Of course I should, but that wouldn't matter in the least. Bollard Bay isn't part of the harbour, and nothing useful could ever be done with it. Why, there isn't more than six foot of water over it at low tide. For the matter of that, when the jetty has been extended, it wouldn't be a very great matter to drain Bollard Lake and use the site for building factories. Land in Brenthithe will be very valuable once it becomes a commercial port."

"But the summer visitors, and the Yacht Club!" the Chairman suggested timidly.

Again Stanlake brought his fist down with a resounding crash upon the table. "The summer visitors and the Yacht Club!" he echoed contemptuously. "What good are they to a port? None whatever. I admit we make a small charge for yacht moorings, but it doesn't cover the charge for laying them down. Besides, in any case, there won't be room for yachts here when improvements are carried out. And we shall be better off without them, for yachts are a confounded nuisance, always getting in the way of shipping. That objection to the scheme has no weight whatever. As for the details . . ."

And Captain Stanlake proceeded to explain the details of his scheme at such length that it was past one o'clock before the meeting was adjourned.

The thunderstorm of the early hours had been succeeded by a magnificently sunny day with a light breeze from the south-west. Under these circumstances Brenthithe looked its best. The Old Town, an irregular huddle of stone-built houses with red roofs, lay on the eastern side of the harbour. The main thoroughfare, the long narrow High Street, ran at a gentle slope east and west down to the quay, where it lost itself in a wide open space which had once been the fish market. To the southward of the market was the broad quay, bounded on its landward side by a row of tall warehouses, now mostly disused. At the southward end of this row of warehouses stood the custom house, and next to it the harbour office, from which Captain Stanlake exercised his autocratic rule.

There were two methods of crossing the harbour. The first was by the old ferry, which ran from the fish market to a flight of steep stone steps on the west jetty. This ferry was served by an open boat, rowed by a patriarch popularly known as Neddy. It was, from the nature of things, suitable only

for pedestrians, and fairly agile ones at that. Neddy's authorised fee was a penny for the single journey.

The second means of crossing was by way of the chain ferry, a quarter of a mile or so higher up the harbour. This consisted of a floating platform capable of accommodating wheeled traffic, and driven by an antiquated steam engine. This contrivance puffed and clattered from shore to shore at irregular intervals. The scale of charges was so complicated that very few inhabitants of Brenthithe professed to understand them.

The chain ferry started at six o'clock in the morning and ceased operations at ten in the evening in winter and eleven-thirty in summer. Neddy was bound by no such rigid time-table. If he happened to be about he would take you across at any hour. But if he had gone to bed, which might happen at any hour after the closing of the Topsail Schooner, you could ring the ferry bell all night without arousing him.

Standing as a natural breaker before the entrance of Brenthithe harbour, and separated from it by the narrow and enclosed piece of water known as Bollard Bay, was Bollard Head, a spur of rock rising at its highest point to a couple of hundred feet. Round the shores of Bollard Bay and on the slopes of the headland itself the New Town had sprung up within the last hundred years. Although the New Town formed part of the borough, it had no interest in common with the original Brenthithe and its harbour. The New Town was a seaside resort, pure and simple, shamelessly advertising its amenities in the hopes of attracting visitors. The majority of its buildings were boarding houses, more or less skilfully camouflaged as private hotels.

Failing either of the two ferries, the only means of communication between the Old Town and the New was by the bridge at Brent Royal, a route which involved a detour of fifteen miles. Above the harbour the River Brent widened into an inland lake, shallow, but of considerable extent, being some seven miles long and four miles wide. Brent Royal, a straggling village surrounding a big cement works, stood at the head of this lake. The main line of railway passed through it and, in passing, threw a spur down to Brenthithe station in the New Town.

On leaving the Town Hall, Captain Stanlake walked down High Street towards the harbour until he reached number 47. This was a double-fronted shop with window-panes so dirty that it was difficult to ascertain the nature of the goods inside. The sign above it was scarcely more helpful, for in the course of the years the paint had become barely legible. A keen pair of eyes,

however, might have traced the lettering, "Alfred Rumwell, Marine Store Dealer."

The door of the shop, though closed, was not locked, and Stanlake pushed it open. He walked straight through the shop to a passage at the back from which rose a flight of stairs. He climbed these to the first floor and then flung open the door of a curiously-furnished sitting-room. "Steward," he bellowed.

An unseen voice answered him. "Aye, aye, sir, just coming with your dinner."

Stanlake grunted and subsided into a heavy teak chair which gave the impression of being the only article of furniture in the room calculated to stand his weight.

A few minutes later a worried-looking little man wearing a white coat bustled in, bearing his master's dinner. Captain Stanlake was a hearty eater. On this occasion the menu was thick soup, roast mutton with potatoes and other vegetables, roly-poly pudding and a plentiful supply of cheese. Having finished his dinner, Stanlake lighted a cigar and after half an hour's interval for digestion, made his majestic way to the harbour office.

At about the same time as the Harbour Master reached his office, Sir Vincent Dewsbury finished his lunch. Sir Vincent, in his own estimation at least, was a very important person. He was the Commodore of the Brenthithe Yacht Club, and, in addition, owned several of the more important houses in the New Town. It was his habit to lunch at the Yacht Club House several days a week, and he had done so on this particular Tuesday.

Sir Vincent walked from the dining-room out on to the terrace, chose a chair with considerable deliberation and sat down. The panorama spread out in front of him was sparkling and brilliant in the sunshine. In the foreground was Bollard Bay, occupied by numbers of small craft at anchor, for Brenthithe Regatta was to take place on the following Saturday. In addition to the locally owned yachts, quite a respectable flotilla had already collected from neighbouring ports. Sir Vincent's own craft, a sixty-foot motor-boat named *White Lilac*, was conspicuous among her smaller sisters.

Exactly opposite where Sir Vincent was sitting was the end of the west jetty, with its triangular beacon surmounted by a lantern. Fixed to the ironwork of the beacon was a white-painted disc about six feet in diameter, provided with a single hand. As this dial caught Sir Vincent's eye, he frowned. It reminded him of Captain Stanlake, whom he detested.

The dial, in fact, was the outward and visible signs of Stanlake's inventive genius. For years before Stanlake's appointment as Harbour Master of Brenthithe, during the night watches he had spent on the bridge of the *Cistercian*, his mind had wrestled with the problem of an electrical tide-gauge. Upon his arrival at Brenthithe, he had constructed an experimental model and fitted it to the end of the west jetty. The pointer on the figured dial indicated the depth of water over the bar at that particular moment.

As Sir Vincent frowned at the dial, he seemed to notice something peculiar about it. He got up from his chair and walked across to the telescope which stood on a tripod at the end of the terrace. He focused the telescope on the dial and took the reading of the pointer. "Eleven feet!" he exclaimed; "that can't be right, surely."

He walked back to the Club House and entered the smoking-room, upon the wall of which was exhibited a local tide-table.

"Let's see," he muttered, "to-day's the 17th. Where are we? Ah, here it is. High, 0.47 this morning; 13.23 this afternoon. Why the devil can't they put these things in plain figures? 13.23, that's 1.23 really. What's the time now? Half-past two. That means it's an hour past high water. No, it doesn't, by jove! This confounded summer time always puts me out. Let me see, does one add or subtract an hour? I never can think. Wait a bit, here's a note. 'To convert G.M.T. to B.S.T. add one hour.' B.S.T. is British Summer Time, I suppose. British silly time, I always call it. Add an hour to 1.23, that makes it 2.23. By gad, then, it's only a minute or two after high water now. That confounded tide-gauge is no good. I always said it wouldn't be."

Sir Vincent turned round sharply as another member entered the smoking-room.

"Here, I say, Grimstead," he exclaimed. "Do you know how the tide is?"

"Just turned high water, I fancy," the other replied. "Why?"

"I'll tell you why in a minute. How much water is there over the bar at this moment?"

"Plenty for you to take *White Lilac* into harbour, if that's what you're thinking about. At least sixteen or seventeen feet I should say."

"There you are!" exclaimed Sir Vincent triumphantly. "Now just you come with me and I'll show you something."

He caught Grimstead by the arm and propelled him across the terrace to the telescope. "Just you look through that at that ass Stanlake's tide-gauge,"

he said.

Grimstead obeyed him. “Eleven feet!” he exclaimed. “There must be a lot more water than that. Something’s gone wrong with the blessed thing. It doesn’t matter much, though, for I never heard of anybody taking any notice of it.”

“If Stanlake can’t look after his own tide-gauge, he’s not fit to be Harbour Master,” Sir Vincent replied violently. “Do you know I heard just now that he’s bombarding the Commissioners again this morning with that infernal scheme of his?”

Grimstead laughed. “For extending the jetty across the mouth of the bay, you mean?” he said. “You needn’t worry about that. The Commissioners would never agree to it.”

“If the Commissioners are fools enough to employ a man like Stanlake, they are fools enough for anything. If we don’t sit up and do something, we shall wake up one fine morning to find Brenthithe spoilt for good and all.”

“Oh, it’s not so bad as all that, surely,” said Grimstead soothingly.

“That’s what all you chaps say,” exclaimed Sir Vincent. “It’s not so bad—nothing will happen—everything will go on just as it always has. But I tell you that this chap Stanlake’s a public danger. Perhaps you haven’t heard of another of his proposals? One that’s been approved by the Commissioners, too?”

“Can’t say that I have,” the other replied. “Quite frankly, Stanlake’s proposals don’t interest me.”

“This one will,” said Sir Vincent grimly. “How long overall is your *Ianthe*?”

“Forty-two feet. But what on earth’s that got to do with Stanlake?”

“Listen to me and I’ll tell you. Keep this to yourself, though, for it hasn’t been published yet. I heard it from a private source and I promised not to reveal it. But it doesn’t matter telling you in confidence, of course. After the end of this year, no vessel over thirty feet overall is to be allowed to anchor in Bollard Bay.”

“Good heavens, you don’t mean that!” Grimstead exclaimed. “What the devil are we expected to do then?”

“Lay down moorings on the east side above the chain ferry. And the Commissioners are to charge us pretty heavy dues for the privilege of doing

so. And now perhaps you'll understand that we've got to do something to checkmate this precious Harbour Master of ours."

"Oh, but that's absurd. Lying at moorings above the chain ferry, I mean. Why, it's a Sabbath's day journey from the Club House. I know old Pottern fairly well. Couldn't I approach him to have the proposal turned down?"

"The proposal has already been approved, from what I can make out. And you know as well as I do that Pottern is entirely under the thumb of this chap Stanlake. It was owing to Pottern's influence that he was appointed Harbour Master out of a crowd of applicants, all thoroughly decent fellows, I'll be bound. No, the only thing for it is to get Stanlake removed somehow. The fellow's as dangerous as a mad dog and ought to be destroyed."

Sir Vincent spent the rest of the afternoon watching the tide-gauge. In spite of the fact that the tide fell steadily, as could be seen by the level of the water at the end of the west jetty, the pointer remained motionless at eleven feet.

It still stood at eleven feet shortly after six o'clock, when Sir Vincent, who had collected a group of members around him, rang for the Club steward and ordered pink gin.

"The damned thing's not working, that's what's the matter with it!" he exclaimed. "Now's our chance to get one in against Stanlake. Steward, do you happen to know if Mr. Holden is about the place?"

Mr. Holden, the Secretary of the Brenthithe Yacht Club, appeared and held a short conference with Sir Vincent. The result of it was that a few minutes later the telephone bell rang in the harbour office.

The clerk answered it, took a message and then went into the next room in search of Stanlake.

"Mr. Holden, the Secretary of the Yacht Club, would like to speak to you on the telephone, sir," he reported.

Stanlake looked up from the paper on which he was writing. "What does he want?" he demanded curtly.

"I don't know, sir. He said that he'd like to speak to you officially."

"All right, put him through," said Stanlake. He picked up the receiver of the extension instrument. "Captain Stanlake speaking. What do you want?"

"This is the Secretary of the Brenthithe Yacht Club," came the voice from the other end of the line. "The Committee wish me to make a formal

complaint that the tide-gauge at the end of the west jetty is out of order. This has been a source of considerable inconvenience to members of the Club and the Committee would be glad of an early explanation."

As Stanlake listened to this message, his bulky form swelled as though it would burst. But he managed to control himself sufficiently to reply.

"You can tell your Committee that the matter will be attended to," he said, and slammed the receiver back into its holder. Then he let himself go. "Of all the damned sauce I ever heard!" he roared at the unoffending clerk who had appeared in the doorway with a handful of papers. "I'll teach these lubberly yachtsmen manners before I'm many weeks older, you see if I don't. What the hell are you standing there for like a blasted scarecrow? Give me those papers and clear out."

The truth of the matter was that Stanlake was very much upset. It was not only the tone of the message which he had received, though that was galling enough. The idea that his pet tide-gauge, the fruit of his own brain, could possibly be out of order, was a bitter blow to his pride. He had always explained to anyone whom he could compel to listen, that the apparatus was entirely foolproof and that no combination of circumstances could ever affect its absolute accuracy. And now, if something had really happened, the idiot members of that footling club would have the laugh against him.

Well, he wasn't going to hurry himself. If that precious Committee with its addle-pated Secretary thought that he was at their beck and call, they would find they were very much mistaken. He would go and see what was the matter when it suited him and not before. Perhaps when he'd finished his day's work and had his supper.

In the end it was half-past eight before he set out. He crossed the harbour by the old ferry and so reached the west jetty. Just before sunset the south-easterly wind had increased in force, bringing squalls of rain with it. On fine evenings the west jetty enjoyed a certain popularity as a promenade, but the rain had driven everybody away and Stanlake had it to himself. He walked along the jetty to the iron gate, twenty feet from its extremity. This gate was always kept locked in order to prevent unauthorised persons tampering with the light. Since he had installed the tide-gauge, Stanlake had never let the key out of his possession. The secret of the mechanism of the gauge was his own and he had not yet taken out a patent. He had no intention of allowing anyone else to steal his idea.

Thus it happened that for the last few months, nobody but Stanlake had opened the gate. When the light required attention, which it did at regular

intervals, he himself had oiled and regulated it. He had never allowed even his own men to accompany him.

As he inserted his key in the lock, he glanced across the mouth of Bollard Bay. Right in front of him, barely visible through a heavy rain-squall, were the lights of the Yacht Club terrace. He scowled as he saw them. It was just as well that he had waited until after sunset to inspect the tide-gauge. Those idiots over there would have stood in rows watching him if he had come in broad daylight.

CHAPTER III

INSPECTOR ARNOLD LISTENS

"It's a very puzzling business altogether," said Major Metfield, the Chief Constable of Brenthithe. "Sit down in that chair, Inspector, and light your pipe. I'll give you the facts as briefly as I can, and you can ask me any questions you like."

The scene was the Chief Constable's office in the Brenthithe police station, at the top of High Street, facing the Town Hall. The time was half-past two in the afternoon of Wednesday, August 18th. Inspector Arnold, of the Criminal Investigation Department, had just reached Brenthithe as the result of an urgent appeal sent to Scotland Yard by the Chief Constable.

"I'll begin by telling you something about the dead man," Major Metfield continued. "His name was Robert Stanlake, his age is said to have been fifty-three, and he has been Harbour Master here since last November.

"I'm not qualified to express any opinion upon Stanlake's efficiency as a Harbour Master. But he was a man of a very forceful personality, and he very soon made his presence in Brenthithe felt. His predecessor, an old chap called Robinson, had been beyond his work for several years before he died. Whether owing to his neglect or not, there's very little doubt that the trade of the port fell away very seriously during his regime. I can remember when there were never fewer than half a dozen trading schooners loading or discharging at the wharf. There was a regular cargo service to and from the Channel Islands, and vessels of a couple of thousand tons and more would call here. At this moment, as you may have seen for yourself, the harbour is entirely empty of shipping, and I'm sorry to say that it's usually like that. The only vessels which use the port regularly now are two ships belonging to the Bollard Shipping Company, which is a subsidiary of the Brent Royal Cement Company. They take cement away from here and come back with a cargo of coal if they are lucky and in ballast if they aren't.

"I'm only telling you this because it helps to explain Stanlake's attitude. As soon as he took over he began to make schemes to improve the trade of

the port. It wasn't merely the enthusiasm of the new broom. Stanlake's ambition didn't stop at recovering for Brenthithe its old prosperity as a fairly busy little port for the coasting trade. He aimed at making it a first-class port, and maintained that if this were done not only shipping but manufacturing industries would be attracted to the place.

"Now, in recent years, Brenthithe has sprung into popular favour as a holiday resort. You'll see the New Town, as we call it, for yourself and will be able to draw your own conclusions. It's no exaggeration to say that seventy-five per cent. of the inhabitants of the borough derive their incomes directly or indirectly from what we may call the visitor industry.

"Now, as you might suppose, that seventy-five per cent. doesn't care a damn about the harbour. It isn't the harbour that brings visitors here. It's the big hotels in the New Town with their dance bands, and the bathing and the yachting and so forth. What's more, the last thing these people want is the conversion of Brenthithe into an industrial town. A lot of factories springing up all round would very soon drive the visitors away. Stanlake never made any secret of his proposals and he became in consequence extremely unpopular.

"It's rather difficult to explain to you the amount of ill-feeling which his schemes aroused. You'll find out for yourself when you talk to people here. I'll give you one example. A friend of mine who owns the Grand Hotel on the Parade tells me in perfectly good faith that if Stanlake's schemes went through he would be bankrupt in a couple of years."

"Was there any chance of his schemes being adopted?" Arnold asked.

The Chief Constable rubbed his chin reflectively. "That's a very difficult question to answer," he replied. "Of course, there would have been tremendous opposition from the New Town. But the members of the Harbour Commission, with whom the matter would have rested, have no particular sympathy with the New Town. They are all men whose interests are associated, one way or the other, with Brenthithe as a port. For instance, the chairman, Mr. Pottern, is also a director of the Brent Royal Cement Company. It would suit him to see the harbour developed and industry springing up round it. And the same thing applies, in different degrees, to the rest of the Commissioners. If Stanlake had lived, it's not impossible that he would have got his own way in the end.

"What I want you to understand is that the man had plenty of enemies locally. Now, we'll go into the circumstances of his death as far as they are known.

"The man who found the body is the local ferryman, Edward Knapp. He's an old chap of seventy or thereabouts, locally known as Neddy. You will want to see him for yourself, of course, but you may as well hear what he told me.

"About a quarter to nine yesterday evening, Neddy rowed Stanlake from the fish market on this side of the harbour to the steps on the other side. As Stanlake got out of the boat, he said something about coming back again before long. Neddy isn't quite sure of his exact words, for he's a bit deaf. But he understood that Stanlake told him not to go away, for he'd be wanting him again within a few minutes.

"Neddy therefore waited in his boat, from which he saw Stanlake walk off down the jetty in a southerly direction. At the time it was getting dark and there was heavy rain squalls about. Neddy lost sight of Stanlake after he'd gone a couple of hundred yards or so. A point worth noting is that Neddy, sitting in his boat, was some feet below the level of the jetty and therefore could not see anyone on it unless they kept close to the edge.

"Neddy waited, part of the time in the bar of the Topsail Schooner, the pub by the ferry steps, he thinks for half an hour or more. Unfortunately the exact time at this stage cannot be established. By this time, there was a lull in the squall and the moon had come out. The tide was flowing up the harbour and Neddy saw something floating on it. He pulled his boat out into the stream a few strokes to intercept this object and then found that it was Stanlake.

"Now, Neddy's still strong enough to pull his boat backwards and forwards across the harbour. But Stanlake was a big heavy man, and Neddy couldn't possibly lift him out of the water without assistance. He did manage to get his head above water though, and then he started shouting at the top of his voice. However, nobody seems to have heard him, so he tied a rope round Stanlake's shoulders and towed him to the fish market steps. Then he hurried along to the end of High Street, still hollering at the top of his voice.

"One of my men happened to be on beat in the High Street and, hearing the racket, went to see what it was all about. Neddy told him, and together they managed to get Stanlake out of the water and up the steps on to the quay. The constable was a first-aid man and made a rapid examination. Stanlake was stone dead."

"Drowned, sir?" Arnold inquired.

The Chief Constable shook his head. "I think not," he replied. "I haven't heard yet the doctor's opinion as to the immediate cause of death. But

Stanlake had a hole in his head between the eyes that you could have put your finger into. It looked just as if someone had poleaxed him.

"The constable telephoned to Dr. Nately, our police surgeon, got the ambulance and took the body to the mortuary. Then he reported to me, and I was on the spot when the doctor arrived. He confirmed the fact that Stanlake was dead, and it dawned upon me that we were confronted with a pretty sticky murder. I didn't waste any time, but telephoned to the Yard at once. It seemed to me to be a case where we wanted expert assistance."

"You haven't yet found out how the wound was caused, sir?" Arnold asked.

"Not yet. The coroner was informed at once and he gave instructions that a post-mortem should be carried out. Nately, with the assistance of one of his colleagues, started on the job an hour ago. I asked him to look in here when he had finished, so we may expect him any moment now."

"You've no doubt that the man was murdered, sir?" Arnold suggested. "From what you tell me of the position of the wound, it might perhaps have been self-inflicted."

Major Metfield shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose it might," he replied doubtfully. "But you mustn't forget what I told you just now about Stanlake's unpopularity. There aren't many people in the town who'll regret him. In fact, I don't doubt there are plenty of worthy citizens who are mad with delight to think that he's put of the way.

"The first question that occurred to me was where had the wound been inflicted? I got Neddy to put me across to the other side and then walked along the jetty in the same direction as Stanlake, looking about me with a torch. I may say that from the end of the ferry steps to the end of the jetty is a distance of nearly half a mile. The surface of the jetty is concreted, so there were no footmarks to be seen. I walked along without finding anything until I came very nearly to the end. At the extreme end of the jetty is an iron tripod affair upon which a light is fixed. Just before you get to this there is a barrier with a gate in it. At this point the top of the jetty is not more than six feet wide and there is no railing on either side. I found the gate open with the key in the lock, and just in front of it I found a hat which has subsequently been identified as Stanlake's. I looked about pretty thoroughly then and I looked again this morning as soon as it was daylight. And I have entirely failed to discover any blood or other trace of violence."

"Is it possible that Stanlake slipped off the jetty into the water and struck his head in doing so?"

"It seems to me highly improbable. The nature of the wound seems hardly compatible with such a thing. And I can't imagine Stanlake falling off the jetty accidentally. It's a bit narrow, I'll admit, but Stanlake was perfectly well aware of that. He must have walked along it dozens of times since he's been here. Besides, he was a sailor and had been at sea all his life until he got this job. Sailors are used to narrow places and insecure footholds."

"Was he a man of temperate habits, sir?"

"As regards drink, you mean? They say that he was most abstemious in this respect, almost a teetotaller, in fact. His favourite beverage, I am told, was cocoa."

The Chief Constable broke off, hearing a knock on the door. "Come in," he called, and the door opened, admitting a constable.

"Dr. Nately is here, sir, and would like to speak to you if you're disengaged," he said.

"I'll see him at once," the Chief Constable replied. "Bring him along, will you, Timble?"

The policeman departed and Major Metfield turned to Arnold. "That's the man who helped Neddy to get the body out of the water," he said. "He's a pretty intelligent chap. You'll probably like to have a chat with him later. Ah, here comes the doctor."

Dr. Nately, an elderly man with glasses and a slight stoop, entered the room. Major Metfield got up to greet him.

"You've just come at the right moment, doctor," he said. "This is Inspector Arnold from the Yard. I've just been telling him what I know about this business. We are both anxious to hear what your post-mortem has revealed. Have you discovered the cause of poor Stanlake's death?"

"That I have," Dr. Nately replied grimly. He put his fingers in his waistcoat pocket. "Here it is," he continued.

Arnold and the Chief Constable bent over the table to examine the object which the doctor laid upon it. It was a cylindrical piece of copper, about an inch and a half long and half an inch in diameter. One end of the cylinder had been tapered off to a blunt point, and its surface was faintly but regularly marked with slanting grooves.

"Well, I'm damned!" exclaimed the Chief Constable. "Where did that come from?"

"From inside Stanlake's head," the doctor replied. "It had entered by the hole between the eyes and was only stopped by the back of the skull, which it fractured but did not penetrate. As you can imagine for yourself, the damage it did caused instant death."

"No doubt about that, I suppose?" the Chief Constable asked.

"Not the slightest. The shock of a thing like that hitting him would knock any man clean off his balance. Stanlake fell, or was knocked, if you prefer it, off the jetty. He possibly reached the water within a couple of seconds after being hit. And, in that couple of seconds, he had stopped breathing. His lungs and stomach contained practically no sea-water. If he had been alive when he fell in they would have been choked with it. That's one reason why his body floated, because the internal cavities were filled with air instead of water. If you find a body floating soon after death it's pretty safe to assume that the victim was dead before he reached the water. Has the coroner appointed the time of the inquest yet?"

"Yes, eleven o'clock to-morrow morning at the Town Hall."

"Well, you'll hear my evidence in full then. I take it you don't want a lot of medical details now? You'll excuse me if I run along, won't you? This confounded post-mortem has put me all behind."

Dr. Nately went out, leaving Arnold and the chief constable still staring intently at the lump of copper. The latter was the first to speak.

"That's a bullet of sorts," he said. "I know enough about small arms to be able to tell that. But it's the queerest bullet I ever saw in my life. Look at the shape of the thing. Instead of the point being curved, it's straight, as if it had been cut with a pencil sharpener. It's been fired from a rifle of some kind, you can tell that by the marks of the grooves. And an unusually big weapon, too. The diameter of that bullet must be half an inch or more."

Arnold took a small steel rule from his pocket and measured it. "It's more than half an inch, almost five-eighths," he reported.

"An elephant gun, perhaps, though I never heard of one that fired bullets like that. I can't be sure about that, because I'm more familiar with military rifles than sporting ones. However, there's a gunsmith in the town, and he may be able to tell us more about it. Well, really, this is most extraordinary. It's settled the fact that Stanlake was murdered, anyway. He must have been shot as he was walking along the jetty. You would like to see the place for yourself, I dare say. We'll go down to the old ferry, and you can talk to Neddy as he takes us over."

This idea did not appeal to Arnold at all. He wanted time to form his own opinions and then an opportunity of questioning the various witnesses by himself. "Perhaps it would be better not to say anything to the ferryman just yet, sir," he suggested.

"Just as you like," the Chief Constable replied. "You're in charge of the investigation, and I don't want to dictate to you in any way. In that case we'll take my car and cross by the chain ferry."

Major Metfield's car was standing outside the police station. He and Arnold got into it and drove down High Street; at the bottom they turned to the right and followed a narrow road to the ferry yard. By a stroke of luck, the ferry itself was on the east side of the harbour and a few minutes later it started. When they reached the west side of the harbour, they found a wide road stretching away in front of them.

"That goes round the head of Bollard Bay into the New Town," said Metfield. "If we turn sharp left here, we can drive as far as the old ferry steps."

They did so, and got out of the car outside an ancient weather-boarded public-house bearing the sign of the Topsail Schooner. "About the middle of the last century this was the only building standing on this side of the harbour," said Major Metfield. "As you'll see for yourself in a minute or two, things are very different now. Well, here we are. These are the steps where Stanlake landed yesterday evening. Neddy saw him start off along the jetty in a southerly direction, that is to say, towards the light at the end. I suggest that we follow his example though, as I've already told you, I've been along here twice myself without finding anything but his hat."

They walked along the jetty, which had a flat concreted surface with a sheer drop into the harbour on their left. At first the jetty ran over a tract of sand above high-water mark, and here it was several yards wide. When they were about half-way along it, however, the sand came to an end and the jetty narrowed. It became a pier jutting out into the sea, with the harbour on one side and the smooth water of Bollard Bay on the other. As they progressed it tapered in width until they were forced to walk in single file, the Chief Constable leading.

Arnold kept his eyes firmly fixed on the smooth concrete beneath his feet, but found nothing to arouse his interest. They eventually reached the barrier of which Major Metfield had spoken. It consisted of an iron railing about eight feet high with closely set vertical bars spiked at the top. A few

feet beyond this barrier was an iron tripod surmounted by a lantern containing the harbour light.

"This is the place," said the Chief Constable. "Now when I came along last night with my torch, the first thing I saw was something lying on the ground just about where you're standing now. I picked it up and found that it was a peaked cap with a white cover. I took it back with me and Stanlake's man, Bickton, identified it at once as having belonged to his master. I've got it in my office. You can see it if you like when we go back."

"Could you tell me where the cap was lying, sir?" Arnold asked.

"Oh, just about where you're standing. I couldn't tell you within an inch or two, of course. It was devilish dark out here when I found the cap. Anyhow, it was lying right in front of that gate you see and not very far from it."

Arnold looked at the gate, which was set in the centre of the barrier and secured by a chain and a massive padlock. "I think you said you found the gate open yesterday evening, sir," he remarked.

"Yes, that's right. Of course I shut and locked it after I'd looked round. Anybody might have come along and started monkeying with the light."

"Can you tell me exactly how you found the gate last night, sir?"

"Oh yes, I think so. Let me see. The gate was open, certainly. Not fully open, you know, but just ajar, perhaps a few inches. The chain was lying loosely over the door-post with its end secured by the padlock. The padlock itself was locked, I remember, and the key was still in it. I pulled the gate wide open, walked through and went round the light, but I couldn't find anything there. Then I shut the gate again, made it fast with the chain and locked it."

"You kept the key, I expect, sir?"

"Well, no, as a matter of fact, I didn't. I left it at the harbour office this morning. The people there may want it any time to go and attend to the light. But of course they'll let you borrow it any time you want to."

Arnold restrained his indignation as best he might. From the deliberate and conscientious way in which the Chief Constable had destroyed any clues that might have existed, it almost seemed as if he must be in league with the criminal.

However, he could do nothing for the present but accept the facts as he heard them. "The medical evidence suggests that Stanlake fell into the water

immediately after he was shot," he said. "Isn't it rather curious that his body was carried up the harbour instead of out to sea?"

"Curious? Not at all," the Chief Constable replied. "You see, the flood was just beginning to make when it happened, and if he fell into the water on the harbour side of the jetty his body was bound to be carried up. Just the same as if he'd fallen into Bollard Bay, it would have been washed up somewhere on the shore there."

"I wish you'd explain that a little more fully, sir; I don't know very much about tides, I'm afraid."

"Oh, it's easy enough. The tides here are the simplest thing in the world. As a general rule, you may say that the tide turns at high and low water, that the ebb runs for six and a half hours and the flood for six. I do a bit of sailing myself, so I happen to know something about it. You can't see my dinghy from here, but she's lying close up under the Yacht Club steps. But I'll take you out for a spin in her some time while you're here, if you like."

"It's very good of you to suggest it, sir," Arnold replied non-committally. "You were telling me about the tides."

"Oh yes. Well, you see, it was high water here at 2.23 summer time yesterday afternoon. Add six and a half hours to that and you get 8.53 as the time of low water. As a rule the tide wouldn't have begun to run up the harbour before then. But with a south-westerly breeze as there was yesterday, the flood stream may have started a few minutes earlier. Anyway, it was running fairly strongly by the time that Neddy caught sight of the body."

"We don't know exactly when that was, sir?" Arnold suggested.

"We can find out near enough. Timble will know what time it was when he heard Neddy shouting. It isn't a point of any particular importance. There's nothing much more to be seen here. Shall we be getting back?"

"There are just one or two questions that I should like to ask while we're here, sir. To begin with, whose duty is it to attend to this light?"

"The harbour authorities are responsible for it, I suppose, but the thing's electric and doesn't require any attention bar occasional cleaning and so forth. This and the high light that you can see at the head of Bollard Bay is switched on from a box fixed to the wall of the Topsail Schooner. I can show it to you on our way back. They only open this gate to inspect the light once a month or so, I believe."

"Is it likely that Stanlake was on his way to inspect the light when he was killed?"

"No, I think he came here for another reason. I heard at the Yacht Club, when I happened to look in there before dinner last night, that the tide-gauge was out of order and that the matter had been reported to him. I expect he came along here to see what was the matter with the thing. It was a pet gadget of his own invention. You see that round thing fixed to the framework of the light? Well, that's the dial of the tide-gauge, only the face is pointing the other way. There's a pointer on it which shows the depth of water over the bar. The dial faces outwards, so that vessels coming in can read it.

"By the way, while we're here, I may as well show you how the land lies. That's Bollard Head right in front of us. It used to be a barren rock at one time, but now, as you see for yourself, the New Town pretty well covers it. Between us and the headland, where you see all those yachts lying, is Bollard Bay. The road that runs from the tip of Bollard Head to the top of the bay is known as the bay. Starting from the Head there is a terrace of houses. Then there's that big detached building with the flat roof and the flagstaff in front of it. That's the Yacht Clubhouse. The steps leading down from the Parade into the water belong to the Club. Next to the Yacht Club there's another long stretch of houses, then a tall building with balconies. That's the Grand Hotel. After that, there are a lot more houses and hotels until you reach the head of the bay. You will have to look round the New Town for yourself as soon as you get a chance. It's a very fine place in its way, and being August it's full of people. Especially this week, for Brenthithe Regatta comes off on Saturday.

"By the way, you'll be stopping here for a day or two, I suppose? I'd offer to put you up myself, but the truth is that my wife has got all her relations down for the holidays and there isn't a spare bed in the house."

Arnold silently thanked his lucky stars that this was the case. "It's very kind of you, sir," he replied. "But you needn't worry about me. I'm used to finding a shake-down for myself. And I'm afraid I've taken up too much of your time already."

"Oh, not at all, not at all," Major Metfield replied, looking at his watch. "By jove, though, it's four o'clock already! I've got a meeting at five and I should like to run home for a cup of tea first. Perhaps you'd come with me? My wife would be delighted to meet you. Come along."

He began to walk back along the jetty and Arnold followed in his wake. “I think I’d rather get my bearings first, sir, if you don’t mind,” he said. “To begin with, I’d like to talk to that man of yours, Timble.”

“Please yourself,” the Chief Constable replied. “You will find my chaps ready to do anything you ask them. If you want me and I don’t happen to be in the office, they’ll ring me up at home and I’ll be with you in a brace of shakes. And mind, if there’s anything you want, you’ve only got to ask me for it.”

They reached the Topsail Schooner and Major Metfield pointed to an iron box fixed to the outside wall of that building.

“That’s where they switch the harbour lights on,” he said. “A chap comes across from the harbour at sunset for that purpose. Can I give you a lift anywhere? I live in the New Town, about a mile from here. No? Well then, I’ll leave you to your own devices. You know your way back to the police station? That’s right. Well, so long, I’ll see you again soon.”

He got into his car and drove off. Arnold, with a puzzled expression, watched him until he disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

LOCAL OPINION

For some minutes after the Chief Constable's departure Arnold stood where he was, frowning at his own thoughts. Then, seeing the ferry boat crossing the harbour towards him, he walked to the steps to meet it. A handful of passengers left the boat as it reached the steps and Arnold, with a couple of other men, apparently fishermen, took their places. Neddy pushed off, and Arnold, sitting in the stern of the boat, took the opportunity of observing him. He was a rugged-looking old man, thin and sinewy, with a sharp curved nose like the beak of a bird of prey. He displayed no interest whatever in his passengers, not even in Arnold, who was most obviously a stranger. At every few strokes he paused and spat determinedly over the side of the boat. When they reached the eastern side of the harbour, Arnold tendered him a penny, which he pocketed with a non-committal grunt.

Arnold crossed the fish market and walked rapidly up the High Street towards the police station. As he entered the building he encountered Constable Timble, who drew himself up smartly and saluted.

"Just the man I want to see," Arnold exclaimed. "Is there anywhere here where we can have a quiet chat?"

"The Chief Constable gave orders that you were to be allowed to use his room while you were here, sir," Timble replied.

They went to the room where he and Major Metfield had held their interview. "Sit down, Timble," said the Inspector. "Now tell me. How long have you known this town?"

Timble grinned. "All my life, you might say, sir," he replied. "I was born in Ship Street, not more than a hundred yards from here, and I've been stationed in the town ever since I joined the Force a matter of ten years ago."

"Splendid!" Arnold exclaimed. "Then you must know everyone in the place. Now, to begin with, tell me something about the ferryman, Neddy."

"He's been ferryman pretty well ever since I can remember, sir," Timble replied. "I do just remember his father who had the ferry before him, but I was only a lad when he died."

"Is he a reliable sort of chap?"

"Yes, sir, I think so. I've never heard anything against him. Now and then he'll take a drop too much at the Topsail Schooner, over the water, and then he'll curse at anybody who rings the bell for him to take them over. But I don't think he means anything by it, sir."

"I suppose you've no doubts that his story of the finding of Captain Stanlake's body was true?"

"It sounded true enough when he told me, sir."

"What exactly did he say when you met him?"

"As soon as he saw me, he stopped shouting and said: 'Hey, come along quick. That lousy blighter Stanlake has fallen into the harbour and I can't get him out by myself.' I went with him and together we got the body out of the water on to the steps. And then as I was looking at it and trying to see if there was any sign of life, he told me what had happened."

"It doesn't sound as though he had any great affection for Captain Stanlake?"

"He hadn't, sir. And there was a good reason for that. The Captain had told him that it was no use tendering for the ferry next September."

"Tendering for the ferry?" Arnold repeated. "What did he mean by that?"

"Well, sir, you see, the ferry belongs to the Harbour Commissioners. Every so often they advertise that it will be let for the next five years to the highest bidder. Whoever gets it has to run the ferry himself or find some one else to do it for him. Neddy's eldest boy takes it on if his father happens to be laid up. But as long as I can remember, the bidding's only been a formality. Nobody else but Neddy has put in a tender and he's got it at the same price every time. The next bidding is due in September this year."

"And Captain Stanlake told Neddy that he wouldn't accept his tender. Why?"

"He said that Neddy was too old for the job and it was time they found a younger man. Besides, he said that Neddy had always had the ferry at a ridiculously low rent. The Captain's idea was to advertise the bidding all over the west of England, instead of just pinning up a notice at the harbour

office, and then he thought that someone would come along and offer a reasonable price."

"It comes to this, then. Neddy had a definite grudge against Captain Stanlake?"

"That's right, sir. He's been heard to say in the bar of the Topsail Schooner that if he got a chance of tipping him into the water he'd do it."

"He said that, did he? You don't think he had anything to do with what happened last night, do you, Timble?"

"I shouldn't like to think so, sir. Neddy's a bit outspoken at times, but his bark is much worse than his bite, if you understand me, sir."

Arnold let this pass. "The trouble is that we've no accurate evidence of the time when Stanlake was killed," he said. "That's where I'm hoping you can help."

"Well, sir, perhaps I can. Major Metfield told me to go and see Bickton, that was Captain Stanlake's servant. He told me the Captain left his house a minute or two before half-past eight. And I'd happened to look at my watch a few seconds before I heard Neddy shouting, and it was then 9.23."

"If Captain Stanlake had gone straight from his house to the end of the west jetty, how long would it have taken him?"

Timble considered this for a moment or two. "Say five minutes for him to walk from his house to the ferry," he replied. "Ten minutes to cross the harbour and ten minutes to walk from the ferry steps to the end of the jetty."

"Ten minutes is rather a generous allowance for crossing the harbour, isn't it? It didn't take me anything like as long as that just now."

"No, sir. But then it isn't likely that the Captain found Neddy waiting at the fish market. He would have to ring the bell for Neddy to come over and fetch him. Neddy always waits on the other side, because the Topsail Schooner is right against the ferry steps there."

"And a very good reason, too," Arnold remarked. "So that Captain Stanlake should have reached the end of the jetty a little before nine o'clock. What were you doing then, Timble?"

"I was on duty here, sir, patrolling the Old Town."

"What sort of an evening was it, then?"

"It had been pretty squally, sir, but it cleared up just after nine. It wasn't lighting-up time until a quarter-past nine, and anyhow it was a fairly light evening, for there was a moon showing. I know that at five past nine it was a good deal lighter than it had been a few minutes earlier."

"Do you know anything about the tides here, Timble?"

Again Timble grinned. "I ought to, sir," he replied. "My father owned a fishing smack and I used to go out a lot with him when I was a nipper."

"I've been told that the tide began to run up the harbour a little before nine o'clock last night. Is that right?"

"It was running fairly strong when Neddy and I got the body out of the water."

"How long would you expect it to take for anything to float from the end of the jetty to the ferry steps?"

"Well, sir, the first of the flood runs one and a half to two knots when the tides are as slack as they are now. Sometimes at springs I've known it run over three knots. It's about half a mile from the end of the jetty to the steps. The body would have taken from quarter of an hour to twenty minutes to float that distance."

"All of which seems to point to Captain Stanlake having been killed round about nine o'clock; at which time, you say, it was fairly light. How far away could a man walking along the jetty have been seen, though not necessarily recognised?"

"Well, sir, from the top of the High Street, I could have seen any one walking across the fish market, and that's getting on for half a mile. But during the squalls I couldn't have seen nearly as far as that."

"Right. Now what about hearing? How far away could a rifle shot have been heard, for instance?"

"Not very far, if it were fired anywhere round about the harbour, sir. You see, there was a pretty stiff breeze blowing; and the south-west wind kicks up a lot of racket round the wharf there. Besides, the sea had risen a bit. Nothing to speak of, of course, but still enough to make the waves break on the beach opposite the end of the jetty. I shouldn't like to say that any one would have heard a single shot fired at any distance, or that they'd have taken much notice of it if they had."

"Does Captain Stanlake leave a wife and family?"

"Not that I know of, sir. He's lived by himself ever since he's been here, with his man Bickton to look after him. He rents rooms over Rumwell's Marine Stores at 47 High Street."

"Had he made many friends since he came here?"

Timble scratched his head in some perplexity. "He wasn't exactly the sort of man to make friends, sir," he replied. "I won't say that he went out of his way to avoid people, but he never seemed to take any trouble to get to know them. He wasn't the sort of man who'd go out in the evening and make himself sociable, if you understand me, sir."

"Tell me, Timble. Entirely between ourselves, what was your personal opinion of Captain Stanlake?"

"I had no fault to find with him, sir, but that may have been because I never had anything directly to do with him. He always passed the time of the day friendly enough if he happened to see me. Folk say that he had a very rough tongue at times, and there's no doubt that he'd upset a lot of people here with those new schemes of his."

"What do you think of his schemes yourself?"

"Well, sir, I don't know that I'm in a position to judge. But the chaps along the waterside say that if he'd got his way, he'd make Brenthithe into a very fine harbour. There are plenty of them who'll be sorry he hadn't the chance to show them what he could do. The fishermen particularly. He was going to build them a new quay on the west side of the harbour just above the chain ferry, a thing they've been asking for ever since I can remember."

"You said just now that Captain Stanlake hadn't made many friends here. Had he any enemies?"

"More enemies than friends, I'm afraid, sir. I don't mean people that he'd actually quarrelled with, if you understand me, sir. But nearly every one in the New Town was up against him because of those schemes of his."

"Yes, Major Metfield told me about that. So far as I can make out, his schemes, though they would have improved the harbour, would have ruined Brenthithe as a seaside resort?"

"That's about it, sir. And there's no denying that most of the money in Brenthithe is in the New Town nowadays. The people over there who own property wouldn't care if the harbour was to be shut up altogether."

"On the other hand, the harbour benefits the Old Town and the people who use it. Not that many people do use it, from what I can see and hear."

"That's so, sir. What coasting there was has pretty well disappeared since I can remember. Captain Stanlake always said that it could be brought back again if the harbour was improved. About the only trade nowadays comes from the Cement Works at Brent Royal. They send their stuff in barges down the harbour where it's loaded into steamers that lie at the quay. One of them, the *Fulmar*, went out the night before last. I've got a brother who's a seaman aboard her, and he told me that she was going to Goole with cement and coming back with a cargo of coal. The same company have another ship, the *Merganser*, a bit smaller. She went out last week and ought to be due back pretty soon now."

"I should think the Harbour Master's job here must be a pretty soft one?"

"Well, Captain Robinson, who was here before, took things pretty easily, certainly. Apart from the *Fulmar* and the *Merganser*, there are only the yachts and an occasional Dutch coaster with road metal or something like that. But Captain Stanlake wasn't a man to let the grass grow under his feet. He seemed to find something to occupy him from the very moment he came here. And I'm bound to say that he's improved things quite a lot. The quayside was in a terrible state when he came, but it's quite respectable now. Then there's that tide-gauge he made himself and put up at the end of the west jetty. He wasn't a man who ever wasted his time, sir."

Arnold nodded. "You've told me a lot of useful things, Timble," he said. "But I'm afraid you can't tell me the thing that interests me most. It's pretty obvious that Captain Stanlake was murdered, and it's my job to find out who did it. Now, I'm handicapped by being a stranger. Can you give me the slightest hint of where I should start looking?"

Timble shook his head doubtfully. "I'm afraid I can't, sir," he replied. "All I can say is there were lots of folks who didn't like the Captain's ways. And it seems to me that one of them must have done it."

"That's logical enough," said Arnold. "By the way, what was Stanlake wearing when his body was found?"

"His Harbour Master's uniform, sir. Blue trousers and tunic, collar and tie, black boots and the usual underclothes. I went through his pockets myself, sir, but there wasn't very much in them. A pipe, a tobacco-pouch, a box of matches and some small change. That was all, sir. The ferryman told me that the Captain was carrying a bag when he crossed the harbour, but I know nothing about that, sir."

"Have you looked over Captain Stanlake's rooms?"

"No, sir; Major Metfield gave me no order about that."

"Then I think you and I will go there now. You said something about Captain Stanlake having a servant to look after him?"

"Yes, sir, a man of the name of Bickton. The Captain brought him with him when he came here."

"What sort of a fellow is he?" Arnold asked.

"Quite respectable, sir, from all I know about him. He doesn't seem to have very much to say for himself when you speak to him."

"Well, we'll see if he can tell us anything. How far away from here are Captain Stanlake's rooms?"

"Not more than three or four hundred yards, sir."

The two of them left the police station and walked half-way down the High Street.

"This is the place, sir," said Timble, as they arrived at the door of number 47. "The Captain rented rooms over this shop."

"How do we get in?" Arnold asked.

"Through the shop, sir. Rumwell always left the door of the shop open whether he was here or not, so that the Captain could get to his rooms."

"Whether he was here or not? Wasn't he afraid of anything being stolen?"

Timble smiled. "There isn't much fear of that, sir, as you'll see for yourself if you'll step inside."

A moment later, Arnold was forced to agree with him. Mr. Rumwell's stock in trade was either too valueless or too massive to tempt the casual shoplifter. It ranged from damaged fishing nets to anchors weighing several hundredweight. It seemed symbolic of the decline of Brenthithe's prosperity as a seaport. Nothing was new, and, although this was not apparent to the eye of a landsman, everything was old-fashioned.

Arnold glanced round the shop. "What a lot of junk!" he exclaimed. "This Mr. Rumwell doesn't appear to be about."

"No, sir, you won't often find him in the shop," Timble replied. "He lives a few doors farther down with his son, who is a tobacconist. If any one wants anything out of this shop, they usually go down there to fetch him."

"I see," said Arnold. "And how do we get hold of this man Bickton?"

"I'll call him, sir," Timble replied. He walked to the back of the shop. "Mr. Bickton," he shouted.

An unseen voice replied to him. "Ay, ay, coming!"

There was a sound of shuffling footsteps from the stairs and Bickton appeared. He was a man of middle height, thin with a sallow complexion, a weak mouth and watery blue eyes. Arnold put him down at somewhere between forty-five and fifty. His blue suit with brass buttons, though not strictly uniform, suggested nautical associations. He looked from Timble to the Inspector. "Yes, sir?" he said inquiringly.

"I've come from Scotland Yard in connection with the death of Captain Stanlake," said Arnold. "You were his servant, I understand?"

"Yes, sir," Bickton replied. "Perhaps you'd like to come up to the Captain's rooms, sir? He would have wished it, I'm sure."

Arnold nodded, and with Bickton leading the way the three of them went upstairs into one of the strangest rooms Arnold had ever seen. It was half drawing-room, half ship's cabin. The drawing-room half was represented by two flimsy arm-chairs and a sofa of comparatively modern design, having the impression "hire purchase" indelibly stamped upon them. But a heavy teak table and a chair to match suggested the saloon of a ship. This impression was intensified by the walls, which were hung with crude paintings of vessels of various kinds. Among these were suspended a grotesque collection of Eastern curios and weapons of all kinds, ranging from krises to Chinese firearms.

Bickton pointed to the chair beside the table. "Perhaps you'd like to sit down, sir," he said to Arnold. "That was the Captain's own chair. He got it out of the old *Carmelite* when she was broken up several years back."

Arnold sat down and took his notebook from his pocket. "I want to ask you a few questions, Bickton," he said. "To begin with, how long have you known Captain Stanlake?"

"Ever since he joined the *Carmelite* as third officer, sir. I don't mean the new *Carmelite*, that was launched not long ago, but the old one that was broken up. That was twenty years and more ago. I was second steward on her then, but I was promoted chief not long afterwards."

"Where was Captain Stanlake living then?" Arnold asked.

Bickton looked mildly surprised at this question. "Why, on board, sir, seeing that he was the third officer," he replied. Then a light dawned upon

him. “Oh, you mean, where did he stay when we were lying in Liverpool?” he continued. “I believe he had a mother living on shore there somewhere when I first knew him, but I’m pretty sure she died before he was promoted to second officer in the *Carthusian*.”

“Had he any other relations living?”

“Not that I know of, sir. I never heard him mention any.”

“When Captain Stanlake retired from the sea, you followed his example, apparently?”

Bickton scratched his ear. “It wasn’t exactly like that, sir,” he replied. “I didn’t know that he had retired until I got a letter from him last November. I was chief steward of the *Cluniac* then. As of course you know, sir, she’s the company’s crack ship.”

“I don’t know anything about it,” exclaimed Arnold irritably. “What company are you talking about?”

Bickton looked profoundly shocked at such colossal ignorance. “Why, the Monk Line, sir,” he explained. “You’ve heard of them, surely? They run out of Liverpool to the Far East with cargo and sometimes an occasional passenger. It was through a gentleman of this town taking a passage on the *Cistercian* that the Captain got the job as Harbour Master here.”

“Was it?” said Arnold. “Well, we’ll come to that later. You were talking about a letter you got from Captain Stanlake last November.”

“Yes, sir. In his letter the Captain said that he’d been appointed Harbour Master here and told me not to sign on for another voyage but to join him here at once.”

“Told you?” Arnold remarked. “Asked you, I suppose you mean?”

“Oh no, sir. He told me to come. He’d always said I was the only steward he’d ever met who knew how to mix cocoa properly.”

“But you needn’t have come to him if you hadn’t wanted to, I suppose?”

“I wouldn’t have dreamed of disobeying Mr. Stanlake, as he was when I knew him on board. Likely enough he’d have come up to Liverpool and dragged me away by the collar. He was always used to getting his own way, as any one who knew him will tell you, sir. Besides, I thought a spell ashore wouldn’t come amiss, after all the years I’d spent at sea, sir. And it didn’t matter much to me where I went. I’ve got one brother who’s in business in

Birkenhead, but we don't somehow hit it off. The less we see of one another, the better we're both pleased."

"And what are you going to do now that Captain Stanlake is dead?"

Bickton shrugged his shoulders rather helplessly. "I've hardly had time to think about that yet, sir," he replied. "I dare say if I was to go back to Liverpool I could sign on again in one of the company's ships."

"You hadn't thought of looking for another job in Brenthithe?"

Bickton shook his head with more decision than he had yet shown. "No, sir. I don't seem to get on with the folks in these parts. They're all of a gang, and they haven't any use for strangers, if you understand me, sir."

"Oh yes, I understand you right enough," said Arnold. "You hit it off all right with Captain Stanlake, though?"

"I got on very well with him, sir. I understood his ways, that was the cause of it. I always took care that he had what he wanted and never argued when he spoke to me, sir."

"He treated you well?"

"I never had anything to complain of, sir. There might be some who wouldn't like the way he carried on at times, but he didn't mean anything by it."

"Well, let's come to yesterday. To begin with, when did you last see Captain Stanlake alive?"

"It was somewhere between eight and half-past, sir. I can't be quite sure of the exact time. The Captain had his supper at half-past seven as usual, and I could see that something had upset him as soon as he sat down. And when he'd finished, 'Give me the key of the jetty gate, steward,' he said. He always called me steward, you understand, sir. 'Those perishing idiots at the Yacht Club have reported that the tide-gauge is out of order. I don't believe it, but I suppose I'd better go down and have a look.' I took down the key which was hanging up over the photograph of the *Cistercian* and gave it to him. He put it in his pocket and went out and that's the last I saw of him."

"Did he take anything with him?" Arnold asked.

"I couldn't say, sir, for I was in the kitchen when he went downstairs."

"He is said to have been carrying a bag. Is there one missing from here?"

"I'll go and look in the other rooms, sir." Bickton vanished to return again within a couple of minutes. "I don't see the bag in which Captain Stanlake kept his small tools, sir. But perhaps he left it at the Harbour Office, as he did sometimes."

"Tools, eh?" said Arnold thoughtfully. "And he told you that he was going to see if the tide-gauge was working properly?"

"Yes, sir, and maybe he took a few tools with him. You see, that tide-gauge was his own invention and he'd made it himself. There's a workshop behind the Harbour Office and that's where he put it together. He was afraid that somebody might steal the idea before he could get it patented, and he wouldn't let anyone see what was inside of it, not even me. When he'd finished it, he put it up on the end of the jetty himself, and he's kept the key of the gate leading to it in this room ever since. I don't know where it is now, sir."

"It's in the Harbour Office, I'm told. What did you do after the Captain had gone out, Bickton?"

"I washed up and tidied out the galley—kitchen, I should say, sir. And I'd hardly finished when the policeman here came and told me that the Captain's body had been found floating in the harbour."

Timble nodded. "That's right, sir," he said. "I came round here as soon as I'd telephoned to Major Metfield; I asked Bickton to go back to the mortuary with me and identify the body to make quite sure."

Arnold turned to Bickton. "And you identified it at once, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I saw that it was the Captain right enough, as soon as I set eyes on him. But what can have happened to him is more than I can guess."

"It seems that he was shot as soon as he reached the end of the jetty. The point is, Bickton, who shot him?"

Bickton's watery eyes blinked at this. "I couldn't say, I'm sure, sir," he replied.

"Had he, to your knowledge, quarrelled with any one since he had been in Brenthithe?"

"I don't know about quarrelling, exactly, sir," Bickton replied slowly. "The Captain was a man who didn't put himself out much to study other people's feelings. And if people didn't do what he wanted, he didn't mince words in telling them about it. He was just the same when he was at sea, sir.

His watch had to jump to it, or they very soon found themselves up against it."

"Was he popular when he was at sea?"

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that he was a favourite with every one, sir. Most people were a bit afraid of his tongue, aye, and his fists too. But there's no denying that he was a first-class seaman. I've seen him in more than one tight place and I know."

Arnold nodded. He was beginning to form a pretty shrewd estimate of Stanlake's character. "A man like that must have put people's backs up, here in Brenthithe," he suggested. "Come now, Bickton. Surely you must have heard of difference of opinion, shall we say?"

"Well, sir, the Captain was a bit short sometimes when he was on duty. The folks here are that stubborn they won't listen to reason until it's forced down their throats. Only the night before he died the Captain had words with the skipper of the *Fulmar*, I fancy."

"What was it all about?" Arnold asked.

"I don't know, sir. The Captain didn't tell me. It was like this. The Captain was a bit off colour that evening—Monday evening that was. I know that, for he only ate four of the dish of chops that I had cooked him for supper. And afterwards he told me that the climate of this place didn't agree with him and he couldn't sleep. He sat down in his chair for a bit and read the paper and then about half-past ten or so, he called me. 'I'm going out for a breath of air,' he said. 'Don't turn in, for I shall want my cocoa when I come back.'

"Well, sir, I just lay down for a shut-eye with one ear cocked, and somewhere round about midnight I heard him coming up the stairs. He hollered out for me and I brought him his cocoa, which I'd got already mixed. 'You mark my words, Bickton,' he said, 'I'll show some of these tinpot coasting skippers that I'm not to be trifled with. All right, that'll do.' And as I knew that meant he didn't want me any more, sir, I turned in. But he must have meant Captain Frimley of the *Fulmar*, for she was the only vessel lying at the quay. She went out on that tide an hour or so later."

"You think that Captain Stanlake and Captain Frimley had had words?"

"I think it's not unlikely, sir. The Captain never liked Captain Frimley. He always thought he was too young to have command even of a little coasting vessel like the *Fulmar*. But then you see, sir, Captain Frimley's

uncle is the manager of the Bollard Steamship Company, that owns the *Fulmar*, and I expect that's got a lot to do with it."

"Where was Captain Frimley at nine o'clock last night?" Arnold asked.

"He should have been somewhere between the Royal Sovereign and Dungeness, that is, if the *Fulmar* kept up the nine knots she's supposed to do. She's bound for Goole and ought to get in early to-morrow."

This put at least one of Stanlake's potential enemies out of the picture. "You don't know of any one else having quarrelled with Captain Stanlake?" Arnold asked.

"Not actually quarrelled, as you might say, sir. For the matter of that I don't know what passed between him and Captain Frimley. But there are plenty of folk in the New Town who said openly that they'd do all they could to get rid of the Captain. Get him out of his job, I suppose they meant, sir. There wouldn't have been much fear of their doing that, so long as Mr. Pottern was chairman of the Harbour Commissioners."

"This Mr. Pottern was a friend of Captain Stanlake's?"

"And a very good friend, too, sir. A year or two back Mr. Pottern went as a passenger in the *Cistercian* and that's how he met the Captain, who was then first officer on board her. From what the Captain told me since, Mr. Pottern said then that the job of Harbour Master here was likely to be vacant soon and if the Captain cared to apply for it, he'd see that he got it. I think he must have formed a very high opinion of the Captain's abilities, sir."

"Perhaps he had," Arnold said. "That's all for the present, Bickton. But don't you go running away to Liverpool just yet. We may have some more questions to ask you before we've finished."

He and Timble returned to the police station, where the Inspector proceeded to write up his notes. While he was thus engaged Timble appeared at the door of the Chief Constable's room.

"There's a gentleman just driven up in a car and he's asking to see you, sir," he said.

"What's his name and what does he want?" Arnold inquired.

"He told me that his name was Mr. Merrion, sir, and that you knew him well."

CHAPTER V

FAILURE OF A TIDE-GAUGE

ARNOLD leapt from his chair and, without answering Timble, brushed him aside and hurried to the door of the police station.

Outside it was a car, and, in the driving seat, the familiar form of Desmond Merrion, upon whose imagination Arnold had so often called in times of difficulty.

The Inspector's astonishment was so great that for a moment or two he could only gape at his friend open-mouthed. "What on earth are you doing here?" he managed to ejaculate at last.

"I can't say that I'm doing anything particular at the moment," Merrion replied lazily. "What I may do in the immediate future depends largely upon you."

"Well, get out of that car and come inside," said Arnold.

He led Merrion into the Chief Constable's room and shut the door firmly behind him. "Now, would you mind telling me what's brought you down here?" he demanded.

Merrion laughed. "Not a very cordial greeting from an old friend," he replied. "I did flatter myself that you'd be pleased to see me."

"Of course I'm delighted to see you. As a matter of fact you're the one man who may be able to help me. What I can't understand is your turning up unexpectedly like this."

"It's quite easily explained. Yesterday I had to come up to London on business. This morning, having nothing better to do, I strolled along to the Yard and called upon your revered chief, the Assistant Commissioner, who, as you know, is an old friend of mine. In the course of our conversation your name was mentioned, and Conway told me that he'd just sent you down here on what might turn out to be a particularly juicy murder. So, as I knew this place pretty well in the old days, I thought I'd just drive down and see what you were up to."

"I'm glad you did," said Arnold heartily. "You say you knew this place in the old days? How long ago?"

"Oh, towards the end of the war. I was serving in the R.N.V.R. then, as you know, and Brenthithe was a base for C.M.B.'s."

Arnold threw up his arms in despair. "Oh, for goodness' sake, don't you start doing it, too!" he exclaimed.

"Doing what?" Merrion asked in astonishment.

"Why, talking in a language that the average landsman can't understand. Ever since I've been here, and that's only a few hours, I've been bombarded with nautical terms and expected to understand tides and currents and goodness knows what. And now you talk in initials like a Soviet propagandist. What in heaven's name are C.M.B.'s?"

"Coastal Motor Boats," Merrion replied. "They're the most vicious little craft ever invented. Don't you ever be enticed into taking a trip in one if you can help it."

"I won't," said Arnold. "I hate boats of any kind. And I've already been invited to go sailing with the Chief Constable. Did you get to know any of the locals when you were down here?"

"Oh, a few. But I can't say that I remember any of them now. There was the Harbour Master, for instance, a dry old stick of the name of Robinson. At the end of the war I suggested to the folks at the Admiralty that they should give him an O.B.E., because I thought he'd like it. I seem to remember that he got it, though. I can't be sure. In any case, he must have retired years ago."

"He died last year, and it's his successor who's been murdered. A man of the name of Stanlake."

"Never heard the name that I know of. Where did he come from?"

"From all that I can understand of the jargon that I've listened to, he was a ship's officer in the Monk Line."

"He was, was he? Then he must have been a pretty smart chap. The Monk Line don't keep duds in their employ, as any sailor will tell you. So he's been murdered, has he? Why?"

"Because he talked too loud," Arnold replied. "At least that's what it looks like. Was Major Metfield the Chief Constable when you were here?"

"I don't think that was the name. In any case, I shouldn't remember him. Is he a shining light of local detection?"

"He's an ass!" exclaimed Arnold violently. "Perhaps that's putting it too strongly. He's quite agreeable and his chaps seem to get on with him all right. But he can't tell a clue from a colander."

"Well, they've both got holes in them as a rule, after all. But before we go any further, tell me this. Do you want me to stay here for a day or two and give you the benefit of my advice?"

"I do," Arnold replied warmly. "You can act as interpreter, if nothing else. I don't understand half what these seafaring chaps tell me."

"Very well, then, I'm at your disposal. Where are you staying?"

"I haven't fixed anything up yet. I only arrived by the train which got in at 1.20 this afternoon and I've been on the job ever since."

"Um. This place is always full up in August. We may have a bit of a job to find anything decent. Wait a bit, now. There used to be a very decent fellow of the name of Ogston who kept a high-class pub in the New Town called the Lord Rodney. I often used to drop in there in the old days for a drink and have a yarn with him. If he's still there, he'll put us on the right track. Do you happen to have a local telephone directory handy?"

Between them they found one on the Chief Constable's bookshelf. Merrion turned over the pages. "Yes, here we are," he said. "Ogston, Thomas, the Lord Rodney, Brenthithe 4375. Shall I ring him up?"

"I wish you would," Arnold replied. "I'm particularly anxious to establish contact with some one in the New Town."

The inquiry was eminently satisfactory. "The fellow says that he remembers me perfectly well," Merrion reported. "He'll put us up himself, for he's got a couple of rooms vacant which he only lets to people he knows. He can't offer us more than bed and breakfast, but that doesn't matter. We can get our other meals out in the town somewhere. I've told him that we'll be along as soon as we can manage it."

"Good man!" Arnold exclaimed. "Now, sit down there and listen to me. I'll tell you the story so far as I've been able to get the hang of it."

Merrion listened patiently while Arnold repeated the conversations he had had since his arrival at Brenthithe. "It seems to be a pretty queer business," was his comment, when the Inspector had finished. "One thing's pretty plain, this man Stanlake managed to set quite a lot of people by the

ears. Are you altogether satisfied that the ferryman Neddy is speaking the truth?"

"Not altogether," Arnold replied. "He had a definite grudge against Stanlake, and probably now he won't find any difficulty in continuing in his job. It's possible, of course, that Neddy fired the shot and tipped the body into the water while he was ferrying Stanlake across the harbour. But in that case, how did Major Metfield come to find Stanlake's hat at the end of the jetty?"

"It's a pity he didn't leave it there for all the world to see. We shall never know now where exactly he did find it. Do you know, I'm rather interested in this patent tide-gauge of Stanlake's. You've inspected it for yourself, I suppose?"

"No, I haven't," Arnold replied forcibly. "First because I shouldn't know one end of the thing from the other, and second, because when the Chief Constable walked me along the jetty he neglected to bring the key of the gate with him. Now you're here we'll have a look at the thing together. And I suggest that we do so round about nine o'clock this evening. Stanlake appears to have been shot just about that hour yesterday."

"That's a pretty good idea," said Merrion approvingly. "It's half-past six now. How's this for a programme? We'll go and take up our quarters at the Lord Rodney and I will renew my acquaintance with Ogston. Then we'll go somewhere and have dinner, by which time it will be getting on for nine o'clock."

"Right," said Arnold. "I think we'll take Timble with us. He's a positive mine of local information. I'll just have a word with him and then I'll be with you."

Arnold's instructions to Timble were short and precise. He was to get the key of the jetty gate from the Harbour Office and to meet the Inspector with it outside the Topsail Schooner at a quarter to nine.

Merrion drove Arnold first to the railway station, where the Inspector had left his suitcase in the cloak-room. "Mine's here with me in the car," he said. "Now the point is, do I remember my way to the Lord Rodney? I think I do."

His optimism was justified, and they located the Lord Rodney in Atlantic Avenue, a wide thoroughfare leading off the Parade. Mr. Ogston, a bustling little man with a game leg which had prevented him from seeing service during the war, greeted Merrion like an old friend. "Why, of course I

remember you perfectly, Mr. Merrion!" he exclaimed. "You've hardly aged at all since the old days. Lummy, what times those were, to be sure! I remember you and your friends sitting in my bar parlour till after midnight sometimes, with all the doors locked in case the cops should come along."

Merrion held up a warning hand. "You'd better be careful what you're saying, Ogston," he said. "Let me introduce my friend here, Inspector Arnold of Scotland Yard."

Ogston laughed heartily. "Pleased to meet you, I'm sure, sir," he replied. "I don't fancy somehow that you'll prosecute me for selling drinks after hours all those years ago. You've come down here about that business of Captain Stanlake, if I may make so bold?"

"That's right," said Arnold. "But I'd rather you didn't tell the whole town that I'm staying here."

"You can trust me, sir. When it gets out, as it's bound to before long, it won't be me who's let the cat out of the bag. Now you gentlemen would like to see your rooms, I haven't a doubt."

They followed Ogston upstairs, and were shown two very comfortable bedrooms with which they expressed complete approval.

"Just a minute before you leave us, Ogston," said Merrion. "What sort of a chap was this Captain Stanlake? He wasn't here in the old days, was he?"

Ogston's face darkened. "No, sir, he hadn't been here more than a few months," he replied. "As to what sort of a chap he was personally, I can't say, I never set eyes on him that I know of. But I will say this. It's a blessing for Brenthithe that he's dead and gone. And you won't find any one that won't say the same thing. Not any one in the New Town, that is. They say that Sir Vincent Dewsbury, that's the commodore of the Yacht Club, wanted to have the flagstaff in front of the clubhouse dressed when he heard the news."

"Stanlake had made himself pretty unpopular then?" Merrion suggested.

"Unpopular's hardly the word for it, sir. If he'd lived he'd have ruined the New Town and every one in it. But you'll excuse me, sir. I've got a new girl in the saloon bar and she'll be getting busy about now. I'd like to run down and give her a hand."

At Merrion's suggestion, he and Arnold dined at the Grand Hotel, a pretentious place with an indifferent orchestra.

"We shall have to find somewhere more congenial than this," said Merrion, as he paid the bill. "The atmosphere of opulence in this place is positively enervating. Tell me, waiter, is the food here always as bad as this?"

"No, sir," replied the waiter confidentially. "It's only in August that things are like this. The folk who come here then don't care what they have so long as it's swanky."

"I see," said Merrion, leaving a substantial tip on the plate. "And where do you have your meals yourself when you're off duty?"

"At home mostly, sir. But when I take the missus out we go to the Central Restaurant in High Street. It's kept by an Italian and the grub's the best in town."

"It sounds all right. It's licensed, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, sir, and they've got Worthington on draught. I always drink that myself."

"The Central Restaurant for us in future, I think," said Merrion, when the waiter had gone. "Now then, what about that tide-gauge?"

They drove along the road, which followed the sweep of Bollard Bay, until they reached the Topsail Schooner. Timble, waiting at the appointed rendezvous, saluted as they got out of the car. "I've got the key, sir," he reported.

"Good," replied Arnold. "We'll walk along to the end of the jetty and have a look round."

As they made their way towards the beacon Merrion took silent note of the conditions of tide and weather. The water level in the harbour was very low and a faint current was running sluggishly seawards. It was quite obvious that before very long it would be low tide. A gentle breeze was blowing from the south-west and the sky was almost cloudless. In the west the last bright colours of sunset still lingered, and the moon, half-way between first quarter and full, climbed the western sky. It was a fine evening with a prospect of fair weather on the morrow. "It wasn't so bright at this time yesterday, was it, Timble?" Merrion asked.

"It was raining pretty hard at this time, sir," Timble replied. "But it cleared up just after nine o'clock and got nearly as light as this, sir."

"It's in our favour that conditions this evening and last seem to be fairly similar," Arnold remarked. "Hallo, I see the beacon's switched on already."

"Yes, sir," replied Timble. "It's switched on at sunset and switched off at sunrise. A man from the harbour office came and switched it on while I was waiting outside the Topsail Schooner just now."

"That's right," Merrion agreed. "All coast-wise lights are switched on at sunset. Ah, this is the gate you've been talking about, I suppose?"

They had reached the barrier across the end of the jetty and Arnold stopped. "Stanlake's cap was found somewhere just this side of the gate," he said, "It isn't quite certain where, but I gathered from Major Metfield that the distance between the gate and the spot where the cap was lying cannot have been more than seven or eight feet at most. The gate itself was unfastened, with the chain removed and the key in the padlock."

"The gate opens outwards, I notice," Merrion remarked. "Major Metfield found that it was ajar, didn't he? That and the position of the cap suggests that Stanlake was standing on this side of the gate and was in the act of opening it when he was killed. The point is, where could the shot have been fired from? That circular affair fixed to the beacon is the back of the tide-gauge, I suppose? Well, it's big enough to hide any one who liked to crouch down on the other side of it."

Arnold shook his head. "That won't do," he objected. "How could any one have got on to the end of the jetty? Stanlake was careful not to let the key of this gate out of his possession. And I don't think any one would like to climb this spiked iron railing."

"Perhaps not," Merrion agreed carelessly. "No, don't open that gate yet. There's something else worth noticing first. There's an electric cable suspended on wooden poles running from the Topsail Schooner to the beacon, I see."

"Yes, sir, those are the wires that supply the current for the light," Timble explained.

"Then what's the second cable for, the one that's been slung underneath the first?"

"I can't say, sir. I've never noticed that there were two cables."

"Didn't some one say that Stanlake's patent tide-gauge was worked electrically?" Merrion asked.

"Yes, that's right," Arnold replied impatiently. "But look here, we're wasting valuable daylight with every minute we stand here. Let's get on to the end of the jetty while we can still see what we're doing."

"All right," Merrion agreed. "But I'd like you to notice that the second, smaller cable has been broken on the other side of the barrier. You can see the two ends hanging loose. Mind you don't trip over them and fall into the sea. All right, fire away, and open the gate."

Arnold had taken the key from Timble and he now inserted it in the padlock. Some force was evidently required to turn it, for the Inspector had to grasp the padlock in one hand and the key in the other. As he wrenched the lock open, he bent down and grunted with the effort. "This confounded lock is pretty stiff," he grumbled.

"Bound to be," Merrion replied. "It's an iron lock and I expect it's full of rust, being exposed to the sea air like this. What about the gate?"

Arnold unwound the chain and pulled the gate towards him. It grated on its hinges and seemed to resist his efforts. "That's pretty stiff, too," he said, as he dragged it wide open. "Now let's see if we can find anything on the end of the jetty."

He walked through the gateway, examining the ground keenly for any possible clue. Merrion, following him, walked round the beacon to the very tip of the stonework and looked over. Something he saw there brought a quick smile to his face. Then he drew himself erect and stood looking out across the mouth of Bollard Bay. From where he stood, he could see the whole Parade stretched out in an unbroken line before him, with the mass of Bollard Head and the houses covering it in the background. The lights of the Parade flashed with brilliance, revealing the crowds wandering up and down the front. The houses facing him lighted up one by one. The larger buildings, such as the Yacht Club and the Grand Hotel, seemed conspicuous by greater brilliance. In the foreground, lying at anchor in Bollard Bay, were innumerable small craft. As Merrion stood watching them, their riding lights, bright or feeble, appeared in succession.

Merrion appeared fascinated by the spectacle. He stood there motionless until he was roused by the sound of Arnold's voice. "Aren't you going to help me look round?"

"Oh yes, of course, I'll help you look round," Merrion replied cheerfully. But instead of following the Inspector's example and studying the ground, he turned his attention to the tide-gauge. The construction of this appeared to interest him vastly and he did not desist from his examination until he had fathomed the principle on which the gauge worked. Then he turned his attention to the broken cable. He examined the two ends, then coiled them

up carefully out of harm's way. Finally, he walked back to the gateway and stood there looking keenly around him.

"Well, did you find anything?" he asked, as Arnold joined him there.

"It wouldn't be due to your help if I had," the Inspector replied in a slightly injured tone.

"Sorry, but I thought I'd better keep out of your way. Two people looking about in a narrow place like this are apt to tumble over one another. So you've found nothing. That's a pity. What do we do next?"

"I don't know what you're going to do. I'm going back to the police station. I sent a message through to the Yard this afternoon just before you came and the answer ought to be there by now."

"I'll come with you," Merrion replied promptly. "This case is beginning to interest me. It's just possible——"

"What's just possible?" Arnold demanded.

"Never mind. You'll let Timble take the key back to the Harbour Office, I suppose?"

"He may as well. There's nothing more to be seen out here, that's quite certain."

"The clerk said he'd wait at the office until I brought the key back, sir," Timble remarked.

"That's good," Merrion exclaimed. "When you give him back the key, ask him to let you have a copy of the local tide-table and bring it up to us at the police station, will you?"

Timble promised to do this. They locked the gate behind them and walked back to the Topsail Schooner. Timble entered the bar and came out with Neddy the ferryman, the latter still wiping the froth off his lips. They crossed the harbour to the fish market and there separated, Timble taking the key to the harbour office while Arnold and Merrion walked up High Street to the police station.

Seated once more in the Chief Constable's room, Merrion lighted a cigarette and smiled benignly at the Inspector. "So your investigation at the end of the jetty didn't yield any results," he asked quietly.

"No, it didn't," Arnold replied. "There's absolutely nothing to be seen there, I'm quite satisfied of that. But then I wasn't the first on the scene, you

must remember. What gets my goat is that there may have been something when that blundering ass Major Metfield went along there last night."

"Yes, he may have missed quite a lot," said Merrion thoughtfully. "But, you know, there are still plenty of interesting things to be seen there. I'll tell you about them, if you like. But didn't you say you were expecting a message from the Yard?"

"Here it is. I asked them to get hold of a firearms expert and send him down. He's coming by the night train and he'll be here first thing in the morning."

"The idea being, I suppose, to try and identify the weapon from which that most curious bullet was fired?"

"That's it. I'm particularly anxious to have an opinion of some kind before the inquest opens. Meanwhile, I'd like to hear about those interesting things you profess to have seen just now."

"All right, I'll give you a list of them in the order in which they presented themselves to me. First, the smaller electric cable which runs down the jetty was put there to supply current for Stanlake's tide-gauge."

"Oh hell!" Arnold exclaimed impatiently. "What's that got to do with the case? And besides, what was the point in running a second cable? I don't profess to be an electrical expert, but it seems to me that the current required for the tide-gauge could have been tapped off the cable which supplied the light for the beacon."

"Ah, but it couldn't," Merrion replied sagely. "The current in the main cable is controlled by the switch on the wall of the Topsail Schooner. The current is turned off by day and on by night. That would be no good for the tide-gauge, which has to work continuously. So it was necessary to run another cable."

"Perhaps you're right, but what the devil has it got to do with Stanlake's death?"

"Quite a lot, I fancy. We'll come back to that in a minute. My second point is this. As soon as we got to the gateway I walked along to the end of the jetty and looked over. And there I found an iron ladder fixed into the stonework and running into the sea on the harbour side. And I confess that I rather expected to find something of the kind."

"An iron ladder!" Arnold exclaimed. "I never thought of looking for anything like that. Why, it means that any one in a boat— —"

Merrion caught him up. “It means that any one who had a boat at his disposal could reach the end of the jetty without passing the barrier. And that, I think, is a very important consideration. Equally important, however, is the fact that if a boat had been lying at that ladder at nine o’clock last night Stanlake could not have failed to see it as he walked along the jetty. Ah, here comes Timble. Have you brought that tide-table with you?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Timble, who had just entered the room. “Here it is.”

He handed Merrion the tide-table, and Arnold dismissed him with a nod. “Go ahead, my friend,” he said, “you’ve made one interesting point, anyhow.”

“It’s nice to hear you say that,” said Merrion. “You’re usually so terribly critical of my amateur efforts. Now, here’s my third point. From the end of the jetty one gets a really magnificent view of the whole of the New Town, and of the small craft lying in Bollard Bay. It’s a pity you hadn’t time to look at it for yourself, it’s really very impressive.”

“I dare say it is. But what about it?”

“The view from the jetty is of no particular importance, but the converse is. The view from the gateway is nearly as good as it is from the tip of the jetty. Which means that any one standing at the gateway at nine o’clock last night would have been visible, but for the rain squalls, to hundreds of people in the New Town, and to almost anybody on board one of the yachts lying in the bay. Mind you, I don’t say that Stanlake would have been conspicuous standing there. The point I want to make is that any one who expected him to be there would have no difficulty in seeing him.

“My fourth point brings us back to the tide-gauge. The principle of the thing is simplicity itself. A resistance coil has been fixed to the side of the jetty between high and low-water mark. A copper conductor runs down below low-water mark close beside the resistance coil. A current passes between the two and the strength of that current will vary according to the state of the tide. When the tide is high, very little of the resistance coil will be exposed and the current will be relatively strong. On the other hand, when the tide is low, most of the resistance coil will be exposed, and the current will be relatively weak. This current passes through a solenoid which controls the movement of the pointer across the dial. It is quite an ingenious idea, and shows that Stanlake must have been a pretty clever fellow in his way.”

“He didn’t die of excess of cleverness,” Arnold objected.

"I know he didn't. But now you understand how the tide-gauge works you can see what would happen if the current was interrupted for any reason. The pointer would remain where it was at the moment of interruption. The fact that the cable supplying that current is broken accounts for the tide-gauge being out of order. But it isn't simply broken in the accidental sense. It has been deliberately cut through with a sharp pair of pliers. Now, you find something to amuse yourself with while I do a simple calculation."

Merrion picked up the tide-table which Timble had brought him and studied it. As a result he made the following notes:

August 16th—High-water Brenthithe, 12.11 G.M.T.
August 17th—Low-water Brenthithe, 18.43 G.M.T.
August 17th—High-water Brenthithe, 0.47 G.M.T.
August 16th-17th—Depth of water over harbour bar: High-water—16 ft. 6 inches.
Low-water—6 ft.

"That gives us something to go upon," he said aloud. "Now you shall hear the fifth and last of my observations just now. The pointer of the tide-gauge is designed to show the depth of water over the bar. When we were there it was just about low water. According to this table, the depth of water then should have been somewhere about six feet. I noticed, however, that the pointer showed eleven feet."

"We knew already that the blessed thing was out of order," Arnold replied. "That's what took Stanlake along to the end of the jetty yesterday evening. He told his man Bickton that he was going to see what was the matter with it."

"But you didn't know what put the tide-gauge out of order," Merrion persisted. "We know now that it failed to work because the current supplying it was interrupted. And it was interrupted by someone who deliberately cut the cable with a pair of pliers."

Arnold sighed. "You're barking up the wrong tree," he said. "I'm investigating the cause of Stanlake's murder—not the cause of the failure of his confounded tide-gauge."

"I know you are. But I'm convinced that there is a vital connection between the two events. If that is so the tide-gauge can speak and tell us something that Stanlake cannot."

Arnold glanced at his friend with a puzzled frown. “The tide-gauge can speak!” he exclaimed. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“I’m talking sound common sense. You’ll see for yourself in a moment. Now, can you answer these questions? Who cut the cable and when and why did he do it?”

“I’m blessed if I know,” Arnold replied. “And quite frankly, I don’t very much care.”

Merrion smiled. “Because you don’t see the significance of that cutting. Hasn’t it occurred to you that the tide-gauge was deliberately put out of order for a definite purpose?”

“What purpose?” Arnold asked.

“To ensure that Stanlake should go to the end of the jetty, and that he should go alone,” Merrion replied slowly.

CHAPTER VI

EXPERT EVIDENCE

ARNOLD made no immediate reply. He took his tobacco pouch from his pocket, filled his pipe with extreme deliberation and lighted it. "There may be something in that," he grunted at last.

"There's quite a lot in it," Merrion replied confidently. "My theory is this. Some person, at present unknown, decided that Stanlake would be better dead than alive. After some consideration of the various methods of murder, he decided that shooting would suit his purposes best. In order to commit the crime with some degree of safety to himself, it would be necessary to lure his victim to a lonely spot. The end of the jetty was an ideal spot for the purpose and the lure existed in the tide-gauge. It was Stanlake's pet gadget. He wouldn't allow any one else to go near it, and if anything went wrong with it, he was perfectly certain to inspect it alone.

"Now the tide-gauge can't tell us who cut the cable, but it can tell us when it was cut. As soon as the current was interrupted the pointer came to rest, and has remained in that position ever since. It follows, therefore, that the cable was cut at some time when there was eleven feet of water over the bar, and that time we can discover without any difficulty."

"I'll gladly leave the discovery to you," said Arnold from behind a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Well, I'll proceed to make it now," said Merrion, taking up the piece of paper on which he had made his notes. "To begin with, the fact that the tide-gauge was out of order was reported to Stanlake on Tuesday afternoon. We don't yet know how long it had been out of order at that time. But we can make inquiries, and I expect we shall find that it was working all right on Monday. If it had not been, someone would surely have noticed it.

"Now the tide-table tells us this. On Monday and Tuesday the depths of water over the bar were 6 feet at low water and 16 feet 6 inches at high water. The mean between these two figures is 11 feet 3 inches, which for our purpose approximates nearly enough to 11 feet. That means that, in normal

circumstances, there would be 11 feet of water over the bar half-way between the times of high and low water."

Arnold nodded. "It seems pretty straightforward so far," he remarked.

"It gets simpler as we go along. Now just think for a minute what the tide does. Starting from low water, it rises till it reaches high water and then sinks to low water again, the complete cycle taking between twelve and thirteen hours. The tide will be at any given height twice during that cycle, once when it is rising and again when it is falling. In other words, there will be 11 feet of water over the bar here four times in a period of about twenty-five hours.

"Now if you look at this bit of paper, you will see that I have jotted down the times of three consecutive high-waters and of the low-waters which occurred between them. There they are:

"High-water	12.11—16th.
Low-water	18.43—16th.
High-water	0.47—17th.
Low-water	7.18—17th.
High-water	13.21—17th.

"I must warn you, of course, that these are all Greenwich Mean Time, not this ridiculous summer time which complicates things so absurdly.

"We have already agreed that there will be 11 feet of water over the bar at any time half-way between those of high and low water. All we've got to do then is to interpolate those half-way times. I've done it already for you on this paper. We get 15.27 and 21.45 on Monday and 4.2 and 10.19 on Tuesday. Converting those figures into summer time we get 4.27 p.m. and 10.45 p.m. on the 16th and 5.2 a.m. and 11.19 a.m. on the 17th.

"Now if we can find out that the gauge was working properly at four o'clock on Monday afternoon, it's perfectly certain that the cable must have been cut at one of those times. The point is, which one? I think you will agree that it is most probable that whoever cut the cable did so under the cover of darkness. That puts out 4.27 p.m. on the 16th and 11.19 a.m. on the 17th. At both those times it was, of course, broad daylight. It must have been fairly light at 5.2 a.m. on the 17th. The sun rose that day at 5.43. But at 10.45 p.m. on the 16th, it must have been as dark as pitch. That seems to me, therefore, the most likely time at which the cable was cut."

"Nearly twenty-four hours before Stanlake was shot," Arnold remarked. "And that suggests to me the weak point in your theory. It's all very fine to suggest that the tide-gauge was put out of action in order to get Stanlake out on to the jetty. But who could tell, first when he would find out that anything was wrong, and secondly when he would set out to repair it?

"I'm not trying to throw cold water on your idea, because I really believe you've hit the nail on the head this time. But suppose that someone had reported the breakdown to Stanlake, say at noon yesterday, and he had straightaway gone to see what was the matter? Would he have been shot in broad daylight? It doesn't sound to me in the least likely. Again, did the murderer lie in wake for Stanlake at the end of the jetty all day yesterday?"

"I'm not yet convinced that the shot was fired from the end of the jetty," Merrion replied. "It may have been. That confounded ladder would make it perfectly easy for anyone to reach the jetty from the sea. But I think it much more likely that the shot was fired from a boat lying near the mouth of Bollard Bay, or even from the opposite shore. We'll have to see what your firearms expert has to say to-morrow about the range. He'll also give us an idea of what sort of a weapon to look for. Meanwhile, I'd like to suggest something else that wants looking for."

"What's that?" Arnold asked.

"The bag that Stanlake is said to have been carrying when he set off on his expedition. Neddy the ferryman had noticed the bag in Stanlake's hand and apparently mentioned it to Timble. I know that Neddy's evidence is not entirely free from suspicion, but I don't see what he has to gain by inventing a bag if there wasn't one. Besides, his statement is to some extent confirmed by Bickton, who says that there is a bag of tools missing from Stanlake's room. And when you come to think of it, if Stanlake was going to see what was the matter with the tide-gauge, it is more than probable that he would take a few tools with him.

"If we accept the statements of the Chief Constable and Neddy, it seems almost certain that the theory that the shock of the impact of the bullet knocked Stanlake into the harbour is correct. Let's try and visualise exactly what happened. Stanlake walked along the jetty with the key in his pocket and carrying his bag in one hand. He reached the gate, took out the key and put it in the padlock. But I noticed just now that the lock was so stiff that you had to use both hands to turn the key. Presumably, Stanlake had to do the same and he was compelled, therefore, to lay his bag down on the ground. If he had been shot and knocked into the harbour at that moment the

bag would still have been there when the Chief Constable made his investigation."

"I wouldn't trust him not to overlook a Saratoga trunk, let alone a small bag," Arnold growled.

"Well, that can't be helped. I'm assuming that since he found the cap he's not likely to have missed the bag. Let's go on with our reconstruction. Stanlake, having got the padlock open, unwound the chain and set it aside, putting the padlock through the two ends. Then he picked up his bag in one hand and pulled the gate open with the other.

"It was at this moment that the shot was fired. His hat fell off, or was knocked off, and was subsequently found some little distance on the landward side of the gate, which suggests to me that Stanlake had not actually passed through it when he was hit. He fell into the harbour, letting go of the bag as he did so. The bag being full of tools sank, but the body floated on the tide up the harbour and was recovered by Neddy. That's the theory as it stands at present, isn't it?"

Arnold nodded. "Yes, if as you say, we accept the statements that have been made."

"It doesn't seem to me that at the moment we've any means of testing those statements. That's why I suggest that a search should be made for the bag. If we can find it, we shall know within a very little where Stanlake fell into the water."

"Unless someone else found it later and threw it in somewhere else," remarked Arnold gloomily.

"We'll have to chance that. Now, how shall we set about looking for the bag? One way would be to dredge for it at low water, but I shouldn't recommend that. You'd be almost certain to drag it from its original position before you got it up to the surface. A much better plan would be to get a diver and set him to work. He would be able to determine the exact position of the bag before he moved it."

"By a diver you mean a chap with a diving dress and all that, I suppose? But how does one get hold of him?"

"Oh, there are plenty of them about, though I don't suppose you'd find a man with the necessary apparatus in Brenthithe. If I were you I'd get on to the Naval authorities at Plymouth and see what they can do for you. They'd probably be glad of a chance of exercising their divers at something useful."

"That's a good idea," said Arnold. "I'll ring them up first thing in the morning. Are there any other suggestions you'd like to make?"

"Not in the way of looking for actual clues. But I think the circumstances want very careful consideration. You, and everyone else, assume that Stanlake was murdered, and I'm bound to say that everything points to that conclusion. But it's still just possible that he was shot accidentally or even that he shot himself."

"I'll admit the possibility of somebody shooting at sea-gulls and hitting Stanlake by mistake," Arnold replied. "But I'm bothered if I can see how he can have shot himself. Where's the weapon, to begin with?"

"Where's the bag he was said to have been carrying? In all probability it's at the bottom of the harbour. Why shouldn't the weapon be there, too? It's just possible that Stanlake had not only tools, but a pistol of some kind in that bag of his."

Arnold looked slightly sceptical at this. Then suddenly his expression changed. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Now I come to think of it . . ."

"What's the bright idea?" Merrion asked.

"Why, when I was in his room this afternoon I noticed several antiquated pistols hanging on the walls. I never thought of anyone using them, though. They looked to me like curios he had collected at various times."

"Most sailors pick up things like that. I wonder if Bickton could tell us if any of these curios are missing. By the way, does Bickton strike you as being a reliable sort of chap?"

"I think so. He seemed to me to be telling the truth when I was questioning him."

"Well, it won't be difficult to find out something about him. The Monk Line people will have his record, of course. And that brings me to another thing. The Monk Line will also have Stanlake's record."

"I don't see that that's going to help us much. He left the Line when he took up this job here."

"That's quite true. But in a case of suspected murder or suicide you've got to look in every possible direction for the motive. In this particular case, the quantity of motives for murder is positively embarrassing. From what we hear, every man, woman and child in the New Town was definitely thirsting for Stanlake's blood. But other motives extending in his past life may also exist. Some secret worry may have made him so tired of life that he decided

to end it. Or again, some seaman from the *Cistercian*, nursing a grievance, may have tracked him down here and put a bullet into his head. It isn't safe to assume that because Stanlake was so obviously unpopular with certain people in Brenthithe, it follows that one of the locals put him out of the way as a danger to the community."

"It looks devilish like that, all the same," Arnold replied. "You heard what your friend Ogston said just now at the Lord Rodney."

"I know, but all the same I wouldn't neglect other possibilities, if I were you. I'd certainly ask the Monk Line people their opinion both of Stanlake and Bickton. There's just a chance that you may pick up a hint that way. And if you don't there's very little trouble wasted. And there's someone else I can think of."

"Who's that?" Arnold asked.

"The chairman of the Harbour Commissioners: Pottern, I think you told me his name was. He ought to be able to tell us something about the candidate whom he supported for the vacant post of Harbour Master. And now, we'd better get back across the harbour before the ferry shuts up shop for the night."

Arnold and Merrion reached the railway station the next morning in time to meet the first train from London. They watched the passengers alighting from it.

"There he is!" exclaimed Arnold suddenly. He walked along the platform to greet a tall, alert-looking man with white hair and moustache. "I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Whitford," he said. "This is my friend Merrion. I don't think you two have ever met, have you?"

"I don't think we ever have," Whitford replied. "But I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Merrion, from our mutual friend the Inspector. Well, what's it all about? Why have I been dragged away from my normal occupations at such short notice?"

"You ought to be glad of a chance of running down to the seaside in August," said Arnold. "Come with us and we'll tell you the story while we're having breakfast."

They returned to the Lord Rodney where, in the interval of consuming eggs and bacon, Arnold gave Whitford the particulars of Stanlake's death. Breakfast over, they drove to the police station in Merrion's car. There, in the Chief Constable's room, Arnold produced the bullet found in Stanlake's head and handed it over to the firearms expert.

"What can you tell us about that?" he said.

Whitford made no immediate reply. He turned the bullet over in his fingers, examining it closely with the aid of a pocket lens. Then he laid it down on the table in front of him reverently, as though it were brittle and of priceless value. "That's the most extraordinary projectile I ever set eyes upon," he said slowly.

"It struck me as being a bit odd when I saw it," Arnold remarked.

"Odd, man!" Whitford exclaimed. "Why, it's unique. It isn't like any other bullet that was ever made. And yet it is a bullet in the sense that it has undoubtedly been fired through a rifle barrel. You say you haven't found the weapon from which it was fired?"

"No, we haven't, and we're rather hoping that you can give us a hint as to what to look for."

Whitford picked up the bullet again and once more looked at it through his lens. "Does anyone here collect—I won't say ancient, but out-of-date firearms?" he asked abruptly.

Arnold and Merrion exchanged glances. "Only the dead man, so far as we know at present," the former replied.

"Was he a man who knew how to use tools?"

"Well, he invented and made a patent tide-gauge. You examined the thing yesterday evening, Merrion, didn't you?"

"I did. And whoever made that tide-gauge must have been pretty handy with tools of all sorts."

Whitford nodded. "I'd better explain, and then you'll see what I'm getting at," he said. "This piece of metal isn't a bullet at all, in the strict sense of the word. It was never made in a mould by any professional ammunition maker. It was turned out of a piece of copper rod by an amateur who was a very clever metal worker but who didn't know much about making bullets. If he had, he would have made the thing with a curved point, instead of just cutting it away in a simple cone."

"What makes you think that the man was a particularly skilled metal worker?" Arnold asked. "Surely it wouldn't be a very difficult job to turn out a plain cylinder like that?"

"It would be the simplest job in the world, but for one thing," Whitford replied. "Almost anyone with ordinary mechanical ability, given a lathe and

a piece of copper rod, could turn out a cylinder within a sixteenth of an inch of the diameter he required. But a bullet to be any good has got to be accurate within a hundredth of an inch or less. If it's too tight it won't go through the barrel, and if it's too loose it wobbles and won't travel straight. This particular bullet has been made with extreme accuracy. Not only does it show the marks of the lands of the barrel, but shows those of the grooves as well. That proves that it fitted the weapon as well as a bullet made professionally."

"Can you tell us anything about the weapon from which it was fired?"

"I can only tell you that it was most unusual. This bullet was not fired from any weapon with which I am familiar. To begin with, it was rifled with five grooves, which is exceptional, if not unique. Then there is the calibre, which is fifteen millimetres, suggesting a continental origin. Apart from elephant guns, rifled firearms of so great a calibre are rarely met with. In your search for the weapon you may confidently rule out any standard type of rifle or pistol."

"You can't give us any hint as to the range from which the shot was fired, I suppose?"

"That's always a most difficult matter to decide," Whitford replied. "I'll have a look at the body, if you like, and that may tell me something. But under the circumstances you mustn't expect any very definite opinion."

Under Timble's guidance they visited the mortuary where the body was lying. Even in death there was something menacing about Stanlake's rugged features. The firm set of the mouth, the determined chin, the bushy eyebrows, even the vivid scar that ran across his cheek, each spoke of the dead man's forceful personality. But Whitford concentrated his attention upon the wound and the skin surrounding it. He spent several minutes examining these with his pocket lens and then shook his head.

"Not very much good, I'm afraid," he said. "I expect you both know something about the characteristics of shots fired at close range? If the weapon was fired within a few inches of the victim, there are nearly always traces of burning or scorching to be found round the wound. This burning is caused by the hot gases formed by the combustion of the powder. In this case there is no trace of any such burning. Even the eyebrows at the edges of the wound are unsinged."

"Then the weapon can't have been fired within a few inches of the man's head?" Arnold suggested.

"I think you can safely assume that. But it doesn't necessarily follow that he wasn't holding the weapon himself. If he had held it at arm's length, the muzzle might have been beyond the range at which burning takes place. However, there is another indication usually found when a shot has been fired within a range of two or three feet. That is, a certain blackening of the skin round the wound, caused by incompletely burned particles of powder."

"Can you see any traces of that?" Arnold asked.

"No, I can't. But the circumstances of this case are peculiar. The body was recovered from the water, you tell me. It is quite possible that a certain amount of blackening existed, but that this was washed off by the immersion, or wiped off in the course of his rescuer's efforts to get him out of the water."

"Then suicide is not definitely ruled out?"

"It isn't. All that can be said at present is that the range at which the shot was fired was almost certainly more than a few inches. In the absence of the weapon and the cartridge, it is impossible to give any more accurate estimate of the range. If the weapon had a long barrel and a powerful charge, the nature of the wound would suggest that the range was fairly long. On the other hand, if the weapon had a short barrel and a weak charge, one would suppose that the range was comparatively short. To give you an extreme example, the bullet of a military rifle has greater penetrating power than that of a toy pistol."

"Yes, I see that," said Arnold thoughtfully. "But you can't tell us whether it's a military rifle or a toy pistol we've got to look for?"

"It most certainly isn't either," Whitford replied emphatically. "I can give you a few pointers though, which may be helpful. Whether the weapon which fired this shot was a rifle or a pistol, that is, whether it had a long or a short barrel, I can't tell you. What I can tell you without hesitation is that this was not of modern manufacture. It was a breech-loader, for the bullet was most certainly not forced in from the muzzle end before being fired. I do not think that it was made in this country, or by a regular firm of firearm manufacturers. It may possibly have been made by hand by a gunsmith in a small way of business. These early weapons made to no particular standard do turn up from time to time, but their only value is as curiosities."

"They might appeal to a man who collected curios in a haphazard sort of way?" Merrion suggested.

"They probably would. But it doesn't seem likely to me that they would appeal to anyone who wanted to shoot at a man and make sure of hitting him, from any reasonable distance."

"What would you suggest as a reasonable distance?" Arnold asked.

But Whitford shook his head. "I shouldn't like to express a definite opinion," he replied. "We can assume with comparative certainty that the weapon was of unusual and probably antiquated type. The bullet was demonstrably improvised by some person with considerable skill in the use of tools. But we know nothing whatever about the nature of the cartridge or the propellant used in it. If the user of the weapon found it necessary to improvise a bullet, he also probably found it necessary to improvise a cartridge."

"It would be more difficult to make a suitable cartridge than a suitable bullet, I should imagine?" Merrion suggested.

"It would indeed. In fact, it would require an expert in ballistics to turn out a cartridge and charge exactly suitable to both projectile and weapon. A cartridge, in fact, which would give maximum range and accuracy at long range.

"On the other hand, anyone possessing the degree of mechanical skill exhibited by the maker of the bullet, could probably contrive a cartridge of sorts. He would have considerable latitude in choosing the weight of his charge. The lower limit of charge would be that which would project the bullet to the necessary distance. The upper limit would be a charge that would burst the weapon. Most people, I think, would err on the side of safety and use too small a charge, to avoid the risk of injury to themselves. Examination of the bullet in this case suggests to me that the charge used was not excessive."

"On the whole, then, you're inclined to the view that the shot was fired at comparatively close range?" Merrion asked cautiously.

"At present I am inclined to that view. But I must repeat that it is purely provisional. The evidence of the weapon, if it is ever found, may point to an entirely different conclusion."

"It looks to me like a vicious circle," Arnold complained. "We don't know where to look for the weapon till we know where it was fired from, and we can't tell that till we know what sort of a weapon it was. It seems to me that the less we say at the inquest the better. By which same token we'd better be getting round to the court. It's a quarter to eleven already."

Little more than formal evidence was given at the inquest. The body was identified by Bickton, who described Captain Stanlake's departure from his house on the Tuesday evening. Dr. Nately explained at considerable length the nature of the deceased's injuries. Old Neddy the ferryman told his story, which did not vary from the statements he had already made. Timble spoke of the removal of the body from the water and its transfer to the mortuary. Finally, Major Metfield was summoned and gave an account of his discovery of the dead man's cap at the end of the jetty.

"You have already taken certain steps in the matter, I understand?" the coroner asked.

"Under the circumstances, I have thought it advisable to place the case in the hands of the Criminal Investigation Department," the Chief Constable replied.

"I am sure that the jury will approve of your action," said the coroner. "The evidence we have heard is highly suggestive of foul play. Is it not the case that certain proposals of the deceased had roused resentment locally?"

The spectators crowded into the body of the court had obviously been drawn for the most part from the Old Town. They consisted largely of men wearing either fishermen's jerseys or the knotted scarf of the labourer. Until this moment they had listened to the proceedings in a silence broken only by heavy breathing and the shuffling of feet. But at this last question of the coroner's a hum of disapproval broke out. Major Metfield was about to reply, but a hoarse voice from the back of the court forestalled him. "It was a bloke from the New Town what did him in!" And a chorus of approving growls testified to the popularity of this sentiment.

The coroner very wisely made no attempt to identify the interrupter. He gathered his papers together and addressed the jury shortly. They had heard that the assistance of Scotland Yard had been invoked. This, no doubt, would result in the discovery of fresh facts which would throw light upon points at present obscure. Until this fresh evidence was available, it would be in the public interest to adjourn the inquest.

As the court rose, Major Metfield approached Arnold and engaged him in conversation. Merrion and Whitford left the building together and walked slowly down High Street towards the harbour.

"Pretty much what I expected would happen," said the latter, "There's no point in bringing in a verdict until there's something definite to go upon. But it looks as though our friends in court have made up their minds about the affair already."

"It does," replied Merrion. "That interruption struck me as being jolly interesting. A great point has been made of Stanlake's unpopularity, but apparently it was by no means universal. From what I can make out, he didn't care whose toes he trod upon. He must have known that his proposals would antagonise every one who was interested in Brenthithe as a holiday resort, but he doesn't seem to have given a damn for that. In addition, he seems to have started private feuds of his own. We have heard that he was on bad terms with the skipper of one of the only two vessels which use the port regularly, and he had certainly contrived to rub the ferryman up the wrong way. But at the same time there seems to be a faction which regrets him, or, at all events, resents the manner of his removal."

"No doubt about it," Whitford agreed. "Those chaps in court just now were getting a bit impatient, unless I'm very much mistaken."

"Yes, and they'll become a lot more impatient if it's ever actually established that Stanlake was murdered. Look here, entirely between ourselves and unofficially, what do you think of the possibility that Stanlake shot himself?"

"It's a possibility that must be given every consideration," Whitford replied. "Mind you, I'm not concerned with motive, only with facts. But of course, the most important fact, the weapon, is missing. Didn't our friend Arnold say something about getting a diver to search round the end of the jetty?"

"He got on to the Naval authorities at Plymouth this morning and they promised to send one along as soon as they could."

"That's good. Do you know, it wouldn't surprise me overmuch if the diver fished up the weapon."

Merrion smiled. "In my turn I'll confess that I suggested the employment of a diver. I had an idea that we might find something besides the bag of tools that has been mentioned."

"We seem to be thinking upon much the same lines. But one of the most dangerous things an expert can do is to put ideas into the minds of the police. His job is to confine himself to opinions upon facts and probabilities. But I don't mind outlining, for your benefit only, a theory which has already occurred to me."

"Go ahead, I promise to keep it to myself."

"Here you are, then. The theory depends, of course, on the weapon being found in the water near the end of the jetty. Stanlake made that bullet and

also a cartridge of some kind. He loaded the weapon, and took it with him when he left his house on Tuesday evening. Having arrived at the end of the jetty, he held it out at arm's length with the muzzle pointing between his eyes and pulled the trigger.

"Now, if that is what actually happened, we can form a pretty good idea of the result. The impact of the bullet knocked Stanlake off his balance and he fell into the water. But what became of the weapon? Usually when a man shoots himself and death ensues immediately, he is found still grasping the gun. But in this case, there are certain peculiar factors to be considered. A weapon of that calibre and firing so heavy a bullet would kick like a mule. It is quite possible that when it was discharged it flew out of Stanlake's hands and travelled several feet clear of the jetty and into the water."

"That particular point hadn't occurred to me," said Merrion thoughtfully.

"It occurred to me as soon as I saw the bullet. But then firearms are my job, you see. The trouble is that even if the weapon is found we shall still be a long way from being able to reconstruct the whole affair. Fortunately, from my point of view, the firearms upon which I am called upon for an opinion are invariably standard weapons firing standard ammunition. I can procure ammunition exactly similar to the fatal cartridge and with it carry out tests to establish the range at which the shot was fired. But in this case, the ammunition was obviously improvised and there is no means of telling the weight of the charge which was employed. Given the weapon and the bullet, I can, by comparing them, demonstrate whether or not one was fired from the other. But that is as far as I can go."

By this time they had reached the fish market, and Merrion instinctively glanced out to sea. An Admiralty tug with a lighter in tow was nosing her way to the harbour. Merrion pointed her out to his companion.

"Here comes our friend the diver," he said.

CHAPTER VII

DIVERS DISCOVERIES

Major Metfield, having cornered Arnold, showed himself solicitous for the Inspector's comfort. "You've found a room for yourself at the Lord Rodney?" he said. "Of course I know where it is, but I can't say that I've ever been inside the house. Let me see, now, Ogston's the name of the landlord, isn't it? Slightly lame, if I remember right. I don't know that we've ever had any complaints against him. You're sure that you'll be comfortable there?"

"Quite sure, sir," Arnold replied. "A friend of mine who happens to be staying in Brenthithe recommended me to the place."

"I see. Well, if it doesn't suit you, let me know and I'll try and fix you up somewhere else. Both my wife and I are very sorry that we couldn't put you up ourselves. You're satisfied with the adjournment of the inquest, I hope?"

"I think it was the only thing the coroner could have done, sir. I hope that by the time the inquest is resumed, I may be in a position to bring forward further evidence."

"Quite, quite. I'm sure you'll do your best to solve this distressing mystery, Inspector. But I'm afraid that I shall have to ask you to excuse me now. I see Mr. Pottern over there and I think he's waiting to have a word with me."

At the name of Pottern, Arnold remembered Merrion's hint of the previous evening. "I should like you to introduce Mr. Pottern to me some time, sir," he said.

"Yes, yes, of course. You certainly ought to meet him. He's a man of considerable influence locally. Besides being Chairman of the Harbour Commissioners, he's a director of the Brent Royal Cement Company and he owns a lot of property here in the old town. Come along and I'll introduce you to him now."

They crossed the fast-emptying room to where Mr. Pottern was standing.

"Good-morning, Pottern," said the Chief Constable. "I saw you in court, but of course I hadn't the chance of a word with you then. Let me introduce to you Inspector Arnold, who has come down from Scotland Yard to help us with this business of poor Stanlake. Did you want to speak to me?"

"I only wanted to ask you what steps were being taken about the affair," Pottern replied.

"We're taking every possible step, and you may be sure we shan't rest until we have solved the mystery. The Inspector will be able to tell you the lines on which we are working. Dear, dear, it's half-past twelve already. My wife has a luncheon party at one o'clock, and she'll be terribly upset if I'm late. You won't mind if I run off, will you?"

And without waiting for a reply, Major Metfield disappeared.

Pottern's expression showed no regret at his departure. "I am very glad to find you here, Inspector," he said. "Between ourselves, I am always doubtful of the ability of a local police force to unravel a case like this. I don't want to ask indiscreet questions, but have you found any clue to the perpetrator of this dastardly crime?"

Arnold evaded this question. "An investigation of this nature is bound to take time," he replied. "For the present I'm trying to find out what I can of Captain Stanlake's character and associates. Perhaps, Mr. Pottern, as the chairman of the Harbour Commissioners, you may be able to help me."

Mr. Pottern rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Stanlake was, in many ways, a most extraordinary person," he said. "Perhaps his chief characteristic was an amazing breadth of vision. As soon as he came here he saw in a flash, as one might say, the possibilities of Brenthithe as a port. At his very first meeting with the Commissioners, he outlined a scheme which, he declared, would bring a prosperity to the place such as it had never known before. So far-reaching was this scheme that it almost took our breath away."

"In your opinion, was this scheme sound?" Arnold asked.

"In theory it was sound enough," Mr. Pottern replied. "But in practice, the difficulties in the way of carrying it out seemed almost insuperable. But there, again, Stanlake's dogged persistency displayed itself. Difficulties in his eyes only existed to be overcome. To every objection that was raised he always had a convincing reply. I have no doubt that, had he lived— —"

Mr. Pottern paused, but Arnold prompted him. "If he had lived?" he suggested.

"It's hard to say. But I believe myself that he would eventually have got his own way. He had, I confess, almost converted me, and I feel sure that the majority of the Commissioners were coming round to his point of view."

"His death will delay the scheme, I suppose?"

Mr. Pottern shook his head. "Stanlake's scheme will die with him," he replied. "It was only his enthusiasm which could have inspired the Commissioners to proceed with it in the face of the powerful opposition which it had aroused. There was no doubt that Stanlake's death is a very definite blow to the prospects of Brenthithe as a port."

"You knew him before his appointment as Harbour Master, did you not, Mr. Pottern?"

"I met him quite casually, as one might say by accident.

"Three years ago I was suffering from certain nervous symptoms which my doctor put down to overwork. He recommended a sea voyage, preferably of several months' duration.

"I was not attracted by the idea of an ordinary cruise in a passenger liner. It seemed to me that I might just as well stay in a large hotel on shore. And I felt I wanted something a good deal quieter than that. So I made inquiries and eventually found that I could go to the Far East and back on one of the ships of the Monk Line. They carry not more than half a dozen passengers, and it seemed the very thing I wanted. And so I booked a passage on the *Cistercian*."

Again Mr. Pottern paused, and once more Arnold prompted him. "Captain Stanlake was the first officer of that ship, wasn't he?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, that's right," Mr. Pottern replied hastily. "A most efficient officer, as I noticed from the first."

"You became friendly with him?" Arnold suggested.

Mr. Pottern looked at the Inspector rather curiously, the latter thought. "Friendly? Oh, yes, certainly. Friendly in one sense of the word only, you will understand. The difference in our respective positions was a bar to any real intimacy, of course. Stanlake and I had several very interesting conversations in the intervals when he was off duty. And I am bound to admit that I was greatly impressed by his character and ability."

"Was he popular with his fellow-officers?"

"No, I could hardly say that. It seemed to me that he was rather overbearing in his manner towards them, and that they avoided him whenever possible. Even the captain, a very mild-mannered and easy-going man, told me once that he found Stanlake rather difficult to get on with. But he was the first to say that he was an excellent seaman and a most capable officer."

"Did you suggest to Captain Stanlake that he should apply for the post of Harbour Master here when it became vacant?"

"I certainly did nothing of the kind!" Mr. Pottern replied with some show of indignation. "As chairman of the Commissioners it would have been a most improper suggestion on my part. Captain Robinson had never said a word about his retirement, and there was every reason to suppose that he would live many years yet. But one day on board the *Cistercian* Stanlake said to me that he was getting tired of waiting for promotion. He went so far as to say that he would leave the sea the next day if he found a shore job which would suit him. And it occurred to me then, that if anything should happen to Captain Robinson, Stanlake would be the very man to succeed him. But naturally I said nothing of this to Stanlake at the time."

"I see, Mr. Pottern. But you kept in touch with him after the end of the voyage, I suppose?"

Mr. Pottern frowned, and Arnold began to see that in some way the subject of his previous acquaintance with Stanlake was distasteful to him. "There was no need for me to keep in touch with him," he replied loftily. "I knew that a letter addressed to him care of the offices of the Monk Line in Liverpool would find him at any time. It was not until Captain Robinson's death that I had any further communication with him."

"You offered him the vacant post?" Arnold suggested incautiously.

"Offered him the vacant post!" Mr. Pottern exclaimed, thoroughly outraged. "If you will forgive my saying so, Inspector, you appear to be profoundly ignorant of the procedure in these matters. It does not lie with any member of the Commission, even with the chairman, to appoint the Harbour Master. The vacancy was duly advertised and applications invited from suitable candidates. I confined myself to sending a copy of this advertisement to Stanlake with my compliments. In due course the Commissioners received a number of applications for the vacant post from which they selected the six candidates with the most suitable qualifications."

"And Captain Stanlake was one of the six, of course," Arnold suggested.

"The selection committee, after examining his qualifications, decided to include him," Mr. Pottern replied. "Each of these candidates was interviewed separately, and finally the selection committee unanimously decided to offer Stanlake the post."

"Thank you, Mr. Pottern," Arnold replied. "There are just a few more questions I should like to ask you, if you don't mind. As Chairman of the Commissioners, you must have been aware that Captain Stanlake did not succeed in making himself popular in Brenthithe?"

Mr. Pottern waved this suggestion aside with a lofty gesture. "You must not expect the Commissioners to concern themselves with the popularity or otherwise of their officials," he said. "Stanlake would have continued to receive their support as long as he carried out his duties efficiently. He was not a man to seek personal popularity, and if his schemes aroused opposition in certain quarters, that was hardly his fault."

"He does not appear to have made many friends in the town," Arnold persisted.

"I can give you no information upon that point," Mr. Pottern replied distantly. "His choice of associates was no concern of mine. I do not imagine that Stanlake would have gone out of his way to inflict his friendship upon anyone. Now, Inspector, unless you have something really important to ask me, I must conclude our interview."

Arnold made no attempt to detain Mr. Pottern, who struck him as being a pompous old gentleman with no imagination beyond his own comfort. He looked round the room which was now empty but for the faithful Timble hovering in the doorway.

"Well, Timble, what about it?" he asked.

"Well, sir, if the coroner hadn't adjourned the inquest, there wouldn't have been much doubt about the verdict," Timble replied.

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, sir, knowing nearly every one in court, I could tell pretty well what they were thinking. The jury were all from the Old Town, unless I'm very much mistaken, they were of the same way of thinking as that chap in the back row who spoke up."

"Do you know who he was?"

"I think I recognised the voice, sir," replied Timble cautiously. "But I shouldn't like to swear to it. The chaps round about the harbour may not

have been over-fond of the Captain, but they knew that he was working for their good, for all that. I don't doubt the jury would have found a verdict of wilful murder."

"I dare say you're right, Timble. Do you know what has become of Mr. Merrion and Mr. Whitford?"

"I saw them both leave the building and go off down High Street together, sir."

Arnold followed this direction and found his two friends still standing in the fish market.

"Oh, there you are!" Merrion exclaimed. "The curtain is about to rise upon the next act of the drama." He pointed to the tug and lighter which by now were lying alongside the wharf. "There's your diving party. You'd better go along and have a chat with them."

"You'd better come along with me," Arnold replied. "They'll probably talk a language I don't understand, and you can act as interpreter."

They found a petty officer in charge of the diving party and, prompted by Merrion, Arnold explained what he wanted done.

The petty officer nodded. "That's clear enough," he replied. "You want an examination of the bottom round the end of the jetty. It'll take me an hour to get my gear ready, and then I'll be ready to start on the last of the flood. The water will be clearer then than after the ebb begins to make. How will that suit you?"

This arrangement suited Arnold perfectly, as it allowed him an opportunity for lunch. The three of them repaired to the Central Restaurant, which they found fully up to expectation. Shortly after two o'clock they reached the end of the jetty, off which the diver's boat was already moored.

Arnold, who had never seen a diver at work before, watched the preparations with deep interest. The diver's boat contained an air pump with a big fly-wheel and a couple of handles, at each end of which a man was stationed. The diver himself, fully clothed but for his helmet, was receiving final instructions from the petty officer. The latter signalled that all was ready; the pumps were tested and the diver put on his helmet, which was fixed into position by his assistants. He then laboriously lowered himself into the water by means of a ladder fixed to the side of the boat.

"Couldn't have had a better day," Merrion remarked. "The sea's perfectly calm and the water's wonderfully clear. You can almost see the

bottom from where we are standing. If there's anything there the diver won't have the slightest difficulty in spotting it."

Arnold nodded. His attention was divided between the men at the pump steadily turning their handles and the stream of bubbles indicating the position of the diver which rose to the surface of the water. By his instructions the diver had entered the water about twenty yards from the end of the jetty on the harbour side. The bubbles showed that he was now slowly making his way southwards.

In the boat seated beside the pump was a naval rating with a pair of headphones and a mouthpiece strapped to his head. This man sat silent and motionless until the stream of bubbles had reached a point nearly opposite the barrier across the end of the jetty. Then he suddenly sprang into life. "He says that he's found something that looks like a handbag of sorts," he reported.

"Right," said the petty officer. "Tell him not to touch it until he's marked the place where it's lying. Pass him down one of those stakes, a couple of you."

Two of the boat's crew picked up an iron bar about twenty feet long, pointed at one end and with a small flag fixed to the other. This they lowered point first into the water. The diver caught it and drove it into the sand at the bottom of the harbour, leaving the flag showing just above the surface of the water.

"He says he's fixed the place, sir," the telephonist reported.

"Very well. Tell him to pick up the bag or whatever it is and we'll haul him up."

They hauled upon the line until the diver's head and shoulders appeared above the water. He caught hold of the ladder and climbed up until he was able to deposit something in the boat.

"All right," said the petty officer. "Tell him to go down again and carry on."

While the diver was being lowered to the bottom again, the petty officer glanced up to the jetty where Arnold was standing. "This looks like the bag you spoke about, Inspector," he said.

"Good work!" Arnold replied. "I'll have a look at it later. Let's see if there's anything else lying about down there."

The stream of bubbles moved steadily towards the end of the jetty without any further report from the diver. Not until he had passed the point and was beginning to move back again on the Bollard Bay side was there any further message. Then the telephonist spoke again, stolidly and without any trace of excitement. "He says he's found a pistol this time."

Merrion and Whitford, hearing this report, exchanged a swift glance. The mystery of Stanlake's death was now well on the way to being solved. "I'm longing to examine that pistol," said Whitford softly.

The position in which the pistol was lying was marked by a second stake, and then again the diver reappeared to deposit the weapon in the boat. Then once more he descended to work down the Bollard Bay side of the jetty.

Nothing further was found, however, although the diver retraced his path to the point from which he had originally started. Measurements were taken of the exact position of the two stakes, after which these were withdrawn. The boat was rowed back to the wharf, where Arnold took possession of the bag and the pistol. Then the diving party got under way and started on their return to Plymouth.

Arnold and his companions carried their treasure trove to the Chief Constable's room at the police station. Here they proceeded to examine it. The bag, which had evidently seen much service, was of brown leather, heavy and solid. It was found to contain a variety of tools, a hammer, chisel, screw-drivers, spanners and so forth, together with an assortment of bolts and nuts. So capacious was the bag, however, that the tools and oddments by no means completely filled it.

Whitford showed no interest in the bag or its contents. His attention was wholly occupied with the pistol, which he examined at length, first with the naked eye and then with his lens.

"I should think this weapon was probably unique," he said at last. "Certainly I've never seen one quite like it. There's nothing whatever to show its origin, but I should imagine that it was made by some small gunsmith in Germany, somewhere between 1860 and 1870. It looks clumsy, I dare say, but it is really a very fine piece of workmanship in its way. As you see, there is a short piece of string tied to the trigger."

"Is it the weapon from which that copper bullet was fired?" Arnold asked.

Whitford smiled. “I don’t know yet,” he replied. “You policemen are so terribly impatient. When I’ve got some of the mud and sand out of it, I’ll have a look at the bore, then I may be able to tell you. At some time in its history, it obviously found its way out East, for an inscription in what looks like Chinese characters has been engraved upon the stock. What’s probably more interesting from your point of view is the fact that it has been fired quite recently. In fact, I think this pistol will tell us quite a lot when I’ve had the chance to examine it properly.”

“Is it too long to fit into the bag?” Merrion asked quietly.

Whitford tried the experiment. The pistol went into the bag easily with an inch or two to spare. “That answers your question,” he said. “Now, you two exercise your brains on the bag while I get to work on this most amazing weapon.”

Arnold summoned Timble and despatched him in search of Bickton. The latter shortly appeared and Arnold showed him the bag. “Do you recognise that?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” Bickton replied without hesitation. “It’s the bag in which the Captain kept his small tools.” Then with an after-thought of native caution he added, “Or if it isn’t, sir, it’s the very image of it.”

“What sort of tools did Captain Stanlake keep in it?”

“I couldn’t give you a list of them, sir. But I know there was a hammer, two or three screw-drivers, a cold chisel and a set of spanners. I think there must have been other things as well, but I never looked through the bag for myself, sir.”

Bickton’s catalogue corresponded nearly enough to the actual contents.

“You told me yesterday that a bag was missing from the Captain’s room,” said Arnold; “is this the one?” He opened the bag as he spoke, displaying the tools within.

“Yes, that’s the one, sir,” Bickton replied promptly. “The Captain must have taken it with him when he went out on Tuesday evening.”

“Where was this bag usually kept?”

“On a shelf in the room the Captain called the bo’sun’s locker. It is properly a boxroom, if you take my meaning, sir. The Captain kept a lot of things there that he didn’t often use.”

“When did you last see the bag in this room?”

"It was there on Tuesday morning, sir, before the Captain went to the meeting of the Harbour Commissioners. I know that, for the plate-rack in the galley had come adrift and I hadn't got a screw-driver to make it fast with. So I asked the Captain, and he went to the locker, opened the bag, and gave me one. And that reminds me; I never thought to give it back to him."

"Well, it's too late now, Bickton," said Arnold. "I'm sorry to trouble you, Whitford, but could you let me have that gun for a moment?"

Whitford, who had partially taken the pistol to pieces, hastily put it together again and handed it over. Arnold held it out before Bickton's eyes. "Have you ever seen this before?" he asked.

"The Captain had a pistol just like that one, sir," Bickton replied cautiously. "But I shouldn't like to swear that this is the same. The Captain's had some Chinese writing on the stock."

"How did you happen to notice that?" Merrion asked, after glancing at Arnold.

Bickton looked at his new questioner. "How did I happen to notice it, sir? Well, it was like this, you see. When I first came down here to the Captain he'd only just taken over the rooms above Mr. Rumwell's shop. The rooms were furnished after a fashion, for Mr. Rumwell used to live there himself before his wife died, when he went to live with his son. But the Captain said that he'd want his own things which were in store in Liverpool and that we should have to make room for them. And when the things came down it was my job to rearrange the furniture as best I could, so as to fit them in. And with the things were three or four wooden cases. I asked the Captain what I was to do with them, and he said I was to unpack them and stow what was in them away in the locker."

"What sort of things were in the cases, Bickton?" Merrion asked.

"Oh, all sorts of things, sir. Curios and that, that the Captain had collected in foreign ports. Some of them the Captain hung up afterwards on the walls of his room. There were a lot of guns and pistols and so forth, and one very much like this one here among them. And the Captain told me that as I unpacked, them to clean them as best I could. That's how I came to notice the Chinese writing, sir."

"Do you happen to know if the Captain had any ammunition for any of these weapons?"

"Oh, no, sir, I'm sure he hadn't," Bickton replied promptly. "They weren't for use as you might say, sir. Only for ornament."

"Pretty ugly sort of ornament," Arnold remarked as he handed the pistol back to Whitford. "Well, Bickton, you're right about the Chinese characters. Now, when was it that you first saw this pistol?"

"When I unpacked and cleaned it, sir. It would be last December, a fortnight or three weeks before Christmas."

"What became of the pistol after you had cleaned it?"

"I laid it on one of the shelves in the locker, sir, together with a lot of others. When I'd unpacked the things from the boxes, the Captain went over them and picked out those he wanted me to hang up on the wall of the sitting-room. This wasn't one of the ones he chose, sir."

"So it remained on the shelf in the boxroom?"

"That's right, sir. I think I've seen it lying there from time to time since."

"That's just the point, Bickton," Merrion interposed. "If this particular pistol had been removed from the shelf when would you have noticed the fact?"

"I mightn't have noticed it for a long time, sir. You see, it isn't often that anything takes me in there. Everything I want to use, I keep in my own locker alongside the galley."

"Would Captain Stanlake have noticed if the pistol had been missing?"

"That's more than I can say, sir. I should think that probably he would. But there's a lot of things stowed away on those shelves, and he mightn't have noticed that any particular one was gone unless he went especially to look for it."

"You can't say when you last saw this pistol on the shelf?"

"I'm afraid I can't, sir. But I'm pretty certain it was there when I dusted the locker round about a month or six weeks ago."

Bickton was dismissed and Whitford looked up from his examination of the pistol.

"That chap's identification is perfectly satisfactory," he said. "I don't believe that there's another pistol like this in existence, and if there were, it would be too amazing a coincidence that both should have had Chinese characters engraved on the stock. We can take it as a fact that this pistol came from Stanlake's collection.

"The next point is: is it the weapon from which the fatal shot was fired? I have no hesitation whatever in declaring that it is. To begin with, the rifling, which is of a most unusual nature, corresponds exactly with the grooves on the bullet. Further than that, the bullet has faithfully reproduced certain minor marks in the barrel. There is not the slightest room for doubt that this bullet was fired from this pistol, and that quite recently."

"That's satisfactory as far as it goes," said Arnold. "The question is: who fired the shot? It's no use looking for fingermarks on a weapon that's been lying at the bottom of the sea all this time."

"No, this isn't a case where fingermarks are going to help us," Whitford replied. "But there are certain other facts in connection with the weapon which seem to me significant. I've already told you that in my opinion the bullet was made by some amateur with considerable mechanical skill. But since the proper ammunition for the pistol was not available, it was necessary to improvise not only a bullet but a cartridge to hold the charge.

"Now, as you are probably aware, and as our ingenious amateur certainly was, cartridge cases for breech-loading pistols are made of copper or brass of a size to fit the chamber. Well, our friend set out to make a cartridge case by the extraordinarily laborious method of turning one out of a piece of solid brass. I've managed to extract it from the chamber, and here it is. It's quite as interesting a specimen of misplaced ingenuity as the bullet itself."

Whitford picked up the cartridge case and handed it across the table.

"It's a clumsy-looking sort of makeshift," Arnold remarked as he examined it.

"It only seems clumsy because the walls of the cartridge are much thicker than usual," Whitford replied. "Actually, it's a very neat piece of work, and it was certainly effective. There's only one point where the chap who made it went wrong, and I'll come to that later.

"There's a very significant thing about both bullet and cartridge case which I'll try to explain. Both have been cut out of solid metal on a lathe. You understand that the bullet has to be cut to a diameter to fit the bore and the cartridge to fit the chamber. Well, our unknown amateur was no botcher. His fit in the case of both bullet and cartridge case was of extraordinary accuracy. Do you see what this means?"

"It means that he knew how to use his tools," Arnold replied.

"It means rather more than that. I don't believe that any mechanic, however skilled, could merely have taken the internal measurements of the

pistol and then made ammunition to fit with such extreme accuracy. I feel convinced that it can only have been done by repeated trial. In other words, the maker of the ammunition must have had the pistol by him all the time, testing the fit until he got it absolutely correct. And it must have taken him several hours at least to achieve the final result."

"That's a very good point," said Merrion softly. "You can't say how long before it was fired the ammunition was made, of course?"

"Only very roughly. In my opinion, neither cartridge case nor bullet have been turned out very long. If you rub a little of the dried blood off the bullet, you'll see that underneath it is quite bright. You know how quickly copper loses its brightness, especially by the sea? In the same way, the outside of the cartridge is practically untarnished.

"Now there are certain peculiarities about this cartridge which you may find helpful. In the first place, it has been turned out of the solid, so accurately as to fit the chamber exactly. Now, no professional ammunition-maker would adopt so expensive and laborious a method as this.

"Then we come to the unusual thickness of the walls of the cartridge. Ordinarily, the ammunition for a firearm is self-contained, that is to say that the rear end of the bullet is secured in the forward end of the cartridge case, and both are inserted in the weapon together. In this case, however, the internal diameter of the cartridge is not sufficient to permit of this. In loading this particular weapon with its improvised ammunition, it would be necessary first to insert the bullet and then the cartridge, two distinct operations."

Merrion nodded. "I see what you're getting at," he said. "Loading the weapon would be a comparatively lengthy business. And if the first shot had missed its mark, it would have taken an appreciable time to re-load."

"Exactly. The next point concerns the nature of the propellant employed. The excessive thickness of the walls of the cartridge would make the weight of the charge less than that originally contemplated by the designer of the weapon. If my estimate of the date of the manufacture of the latter is correct, the designed propellant would certainly have been black powder. Our amateur might have compensated for the smaller weight of charge he was compelled to use by employing one of the more powerful modern smokeless powders. But, for some reason of his own, he didn't.

"I can't be expected to determine the exact nature of the charge he used. But the deposit left in the interior of the cartridge and in the bore of the pistol convinces me that it was not smokeless powder. It appears to have

been of black powder of very inferior quality, with a far from rapid rate of combustion. Such powders exist, though they are not used nowadays for loading cartridges."

"What are they used for?" Arnold asked.

"Pyrotechnics, mostly. For instance, the average rocket is loaded with a powder of this kind. The point is that such a powder would give a comparatively low muzzle velocity. The bullet would not carry any great distance, and would behave erratically at ranges of more than a few yards. This fact, together with the circumstance that the bullet failed to penetrate the back of the skull, confirms my opinion that the shot was fired at close range.

"Having manufactured his cartridge and his bullet, our amateur was confronted with a final difficulty. He had to provide some means whereby the fall of the hammer would ignite the charge. You know, of course, how this is normally contrived. Into the base of the cartridge a cap is inserted. This cap contains a compound which detonates on being struck. Upon pressing the trigger, the hammer is released and strikes the firing-pin, which it drives against the base of the cap. The compound contained in this then detonates, and in turn ignites the charge.

"The construction and filling of such a cap would probably be beyond the powers of any amateur, however gifted. In the present case the difficulty has been ingeniously surmounted by the employment of a bulletted breech cap."

"Such as is used in an ordinary .22 miniature rifle?" Merrion suggested.

"You've got it. They are merely caps with a bullet inserted in the end. In the very small weapons with which they are employed, the cap composition alone gives sufficient muzzle velocity for many purposes without the use of any further propellant. Our ingenious amateur secured one of these caps and removed the bullet. He then drilled the base of his cartridge and inserted the cap. And that's where, as I hinted just now, he miscalculated things a bit.

"Merely inserting the cap, without securing it in any way, was not enough. The appearance of the weapon and the cartridge shows me what happened when the pistol was discharged. The force of the explosion drove the cap back against the face of the breech-block, allowing the burning gases to escape there. In other words, an extensive back-flash occurred at the breech."

"Rather alarming for the firer," Merrion suggested.

"Alarming, and unpleasant as well. If he were holding the pistol anywhere near his face, that flash might well have blinded him. He'd have been lucky to have got off with singed eyebrows and a scorched cheek."

"What if Stanlake had held the pistol himself at arm's length, with that bit of string twisted round his thumb?"

"Then the flash wouldn't have touched him, and his grasp of the stock would have been relatively weak. The recoil of the pistol might well have jerked it from his hand."

"Can you now, having seen the weapon, estimate the approximate range at which the shot was fired?"

Whitford laughed and shook his head. "I should have to carry out a series of experiments with precisely similar ammunition before I could do that," he replied. "Obviously, in this case, such material is not available. My own opinion, which I am not prepared to repeat on oath in the witness-box, is this. The shot was fired at a range exceeding twelve inches and not exceeding twenty feet."

"A pretty wide margin," Arnold grumbled. "Look here, I should like to go round to Stanlake's rooms and see where this pistol was kept. Would you two care to come with me?"

When they reached No. 47 High Street, they found, as before, the door of the shop shut but unlocked. Arnold opened it, made his way to the foot of the stairs, and shouted.

Bickton's voice replied, "Aye, aye, sir!" They mounted the stairs, the Inspector leading, and entered Captain Stanlake's sitting-room, followed by Bickton.

Whitford's eye was immediately caught by the antiquated firearms hanging on the walls. He walked up to the nearest of these and began to examine it. Arnold started to question Bickton. "Isn't this place ever locked up?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. The door of the shop is locked at night. I always used to go down and turn the key myself, when I was sure the Captain was home."

"It was never locked in the daytime?"

"No, sir, never to my knowledge."

"Wasn't Captain Stanlake afraid that someone might come in and steal something?"

Bickton smiled faintly. “I don’t think so, sir. Nobody in Brenthithe would have cared to risk stealing anything belonging to the Captain.”

“H’m. I’m not so sure. Now, let’s have a look at this boxroom, or bo’sun’s locker, or whatever you call it.”

Bickton led Arnold and Merrion to a small room at the back of the house, the door of which he opened. It turned out to be an ordinary boxroom, with no window, and only a skylight for illumination. Two of the sides of the room were fitted with shelves, upon which were crowded a number of miscellaneous objects. Below them were stored a number of packing-cases.

“Those are the boxes in which the Captain’s gear came from Liverpool, sir,” Bickton explained. “After I’d unpacked them, the Captain told me to leave them in here. He said they’d come in useful if he ever shifted his quarters.”

“Where was the pistol lying when you last saw it?”

Bickton pointed to a gap on one of the shelves. “Just there, sir.”

Arnold drew his finger across the shelf, and looked at it. “Fairly dusty,” he remarked. “You don’t dust in here every day, Bickton?”

“Oh, no, sir. Only about once a month or so.”

“I see. Now, look here. That gap on the shelf is pretty obvious. In fact, it’s the only gap of any size that I can see. Otherwise, the shelves are pretty well filled with things. Surely you must have noticed it when you were in here on Tuesday morning?”

“I may have noticed the gap, sir, but I shouldn’t have been able to tell which of the things was missing unless I’d gone over them all. Besides, it wasn’t any business of mine. The Captain might have taken something from the shelf for his own use.”

“Was the door of this room kept locked?”

“It was at one time, sir, when the Captain had parts of his tide-gauge here. But it hasn’t been locked since.”

“How long ago is that?”

“The Captain finished the tide-gauge and put it up on the end of the jetty in March, sir.”

After the Inspector had examined the boxroom thoroughly, they returned to the sitting-room. "I can't understand Captain Stanlake being so careless as to leave everything unlocked," said Arnold. "It's all very fine for you to say that no one would have dared to steal anything of his. But suppose they had? What's to prevent anyone slipping in here and pinching anything they took a fancy to?"

Bickton shook his head. "There wasn't any danger of that, sir. You see, there was always someone about the place. If the Captain wasn't here, I was."

"Do you mean to tell me that you never left the premises when Captain Stanlake was out?"

"Well, sir, once or twice I may have run out to get something when the Captain wasn't in. But it wouldn't be for more than three or four minutes at a time."

"What sort of hours did the Captain keep?"

"He'd have his breakfast at eight o'clock, sir, and leave here at nine o'clock to go to his office. He'd be back at one o'clock for his dinner and he usually took a short nap afterwards. Then he'd go out again, either to his office or to see to things about the harbour. He'd come home for his supper at half-past seven, and after that he'd either stay at home or go out again. While he was making that tide-gauge, sir, he used to work at it in the evenings, in the workshop behind the harbour office. Sometimes he wouldn't come back until close on midnight, but whatever time it was he'd expect me to have his cup of cocoa for him."

"If you had to stay here all the time he was out, you can't have had much opportunity for amusing yourself, Bickton?"

"I'm not one who cares much about going out, sir, and I could always find plenty to do here to keep me busy. Besides, when the Captain stayed at home after supper, he often sent me out. It didn't always happen that I wanted to go, but it wouldn't have done to disobey the Captain."

"And how did you spend your evenings off, Bickton?"

"Well, sir, mostly I went across to the New Town, where I'd stroll about or go to the pictures. The Captain expected me to be back by midnight, and I was never later than that."

"You didn't have many visitors here, I understand?"

"No, sir. The Captain didn't seem to like people coming here. I've heard him say that if anyone wanted to see him the proper place was his office. When the Captain first came here a few people looked in friendly-like, but they very soon dropped off. The Captain didn't seem to welcome them. He never offered anyone anything to drink but cocoa."

"It doesn't sound a very hospitable drink," Merrion chimed in. "Do you remember the name of the people who called here upon Captain Stanlake?"

Bickton frowned and began counting on his fingers. "Well, sir, there was Captain Frimley of the *Fulmar*, and Captain Sneyd of the *Merganser*. Then there was Mr. Leyland, who's chief engineer of the *Fulmar*, and I think the chief of the *Merganser* came round with Captain Sneyd, but I can't remember his name. Then there was a gentleman from the Yacht Club, Mr. Holden I think his name was. I remember him particularly, for the Captain was very short with him."

"What was the trouble?" Arnold asked.

"Well, sir, I couldn't say exactly, for I wasn't there. But the door of this room was open and I could hear what the Captain said from the galley where I was washing up. It seems that the gentleman had come round offering to make the Captain an honorary member of the Yacht Club. And the Captain turned on him and told him that he didn't hold with yachts or yacht clubs, and he could tell his committee so. The gentleman left very quickly, sir."

Arnold laughed. "One can hardly blame him for that. If Captain Stanlake treated all his visitors like that, it's not wonderful that he didn't have more of them. Can you remember any others?"

"Dr. Nately, sir. He seemed to get on with the Captain better than most people here. But I don't think he came more than three or four times at the most."

"How many evenings a week did you get out, Bickton?" Merrion asked.

"It might be one or two, sometimes even three, sir. It all depended on the Captain, sir."

"Of course, you don't know who may have come here to see him while you were out?"

For some reason this question seemed to confuse Bickton. "Well, no, sir," he replied after a moment's hesitation. "You couldn't expect me to know what went on when I wasn't here."

At this point Whitford took part in the conversation. "There's no doubt about it," he said, "Stanlake had picked up some very unusual weapons in the course of his voyaging. From my point of view, though, the most interesting was the one with which he was shot. Look here, Arnold, it's getting on for seven o'clock. Do you want me to do anything else for you? I'm at your disposal, if so."

"I don't think there's very much more you can do, thanks very much," Arnold replied. "You don't want to hang about here kicking up your heels until the inquest is resumed, I suppose?"

"I certainly don't," said Whitford. "I'm a busy man, as you know well enough. There's a train back to London at nine o'clock, and with your approval I propose to catch, it."

"Then we'd better go and get something to eat; Merrion will let us have the use of his car, I know. He'll take us up to that eating-house where we had lunch, and then drive you to the station."

As they walked down High Street towards the ferry a change in the weather was evident. The sky had become overcast and a fresh wind was blowing, bearing with it a spattering of rain.

"Hallo, a breeze from the south-east!" Merrion exclaimed. "That's a bit awkward for all those small craft lying in Bollard Bay. It's a very convenient anchorage, but it's open from the south-east and quite a nasty lop comes in if there's any weather. I know, for I had to lie there once in a south-easter in a C.M.B. when the harbour was temporarily closed, and a most uncomfortable night I had of it."

"I can't understand people choosing to live in a small boat at all," Arnold remarked.

"Most of these chaps don't," Merrion replied. "They use their boats during the daytime and sleep ashore at night. I dare say some of the strangers who are here for the regatta are sleeping on board, but they've mostly got bigger craft which won't come to any harm. It's the dinghies and twenty-footers that will feel it. Their ground tackle is none too good as a rule, and some of them are sure to drag or get swamped. If I had a small boat lying in Bollard Bay to-night, I'd up-anchor and run into harbour before it got any worse."

When they reached the fish market they found that others shared Merrion's opinion. Several of the small craft from Bollard Bay had weathered the end of the jetty and were scudding up the harbour with a fair

wind, bound for a more sheltered anchorage above the chain ferry. Merrion nodded his approval.

"Quite right," he said. "There's no sense in leaving a small boat buffeting about if you can help it. It might easily strain something and, in any case, it doesn't do them any good. We'll get Neddy to take us across. The car's still standing outside the Topsail Schooner, and I'll drive you anywhere you like."

CHAPTER VIII

HAVOC IN BOLLARD BAY

THAT evening, in the back room of the Lord Rodney, which Mr. Ogston had placed at their disposal, Arnold unfolded to Merrion his view of the case.

"Things aren't going to be any too easy," he said. "The simplest thing, of course, would be to assume that Stanlake committed suicide. Whitford's evidence could be made to support that theory. Stanlake was in the habit of using the Harbour Commissioners' workshop in the evenings. No doubt there is a lathe there with which he could have turned out the ammunition for the pistol. He was a capable mechanic, as is proved by his construction of the tide-gauge. He seems to have collected obsolete firearms, and he would know how to set about making ammunition for one of them. The pistol with which he was shot was undoubtedly his own. On Tuesday evening, having prepared everything in advance, he put the pistol in his bag and shot himself when he reached the end of the jetty."

"Being overwhelmed with shame because his tide-gauge had failed," suggested Merrion.

"That's just it. We don't seem able to hear the slightest hint of any motive for suicide. It might be argued that he was a very choleric individual and that his hot temper had eventually developed into madness. But that line of argument sounds pretty thin to me."

"You favour the idea that he was murdered?"

"Most emphatically I do. You can't talk to anyone without hearing of his having quarrelled with somebody or other. He seems to have had a positive gift for antagonising people."

"Unfortunately, it isn't always the unpopular people who get murdered."

"No, but it sometimes is. And so far as I can see not a single item of the evidence we've collected contradicts a theory of murder. What are the facts which admit the possibility of suicide? First, the short range at which Whitford maintains the shot was fired. Yes, but the range would have been

within Whitford's limits if Stanlake had been potted by someone hiding behind the tide-gauge. Second, the fact that the pistol undoubtedly belonged to Stanlake. But we've seen for ourselves this afternoon how ridiculously easy it would have been for anyone to enter Stanlake's rooms and take it. It's all very well for Bickton to say that the place was never left unoccupied. He admits himself that he used to go out sometimes for a few minutes to get things. And how does he know that after he'd gone to the pictures in the evening Stanlake didn't go out, too? Third, there's the fact that Stanlake had the necessary ability and opportunity for making the ammunition. But in a place as big as this, there must be plenty of other people with a similar ability and access to the necessary tools? I think you'll agree that murder is at least as likely as suicide. I'm rather favourably inclined to your theory of a man swimming to the jetty from one of those boats. Can you elaborate that theory at all?"

"I'll try," Merrion replied. "Perhaps we'd better begin at the beginning. We'll start with the supposition that someone had determined to murder Stanlake and to make his death appear to have been due to suicide. For convenience we'll call this man Jones, and at present we won't speculate on his motive.

"The first step in carrying out the scheme was to procure the pistol. As you've just said, this presented no difficulty whatever. Jones, if he watched his opportunity, could walk into Stanlake's room and take anything he happened to fancy. But did he go in on the mere chance of finding a weapon to suit his purpose? That seems to me extremely unlikely. Jones must have been familiar with the premises and their contents. He must have visited Stanlake at some time and been shown into what Bickton calls the bo'sun's locker.

"Now I'm not greatly impressed by Bickton's catalogue of visitors. No doubt the people he mentioned did actually call, but there may well have been other visitors whom he knew nothing about. The very fact that Stanlake sent Bickton out periodically whether he wanted to go or not, seems rather suggestive. It's just possible that on those occasions Stanlake had appointments which he wished to keep secret."

"That's rather an interesting point," said Arnold. "Does your imagination rise as to the nature of those appointments?"

Merrion smiled. "Not yet," he replied, "but it might if it received a suitable stimulus. You had a chat with Mr. Pottern this morning, you told me. Did you get anything out of him?"

"Not much. But one thing struck me very forcibly. He got so visibly annoyed when I suggested that he was responsible for Stanlake's appointment here that I'm quite certain that I hit upon the truth. Apart from that he couldn't or wouldn't tell me much about the man. He managed to convey the impression that the private life of a mere harbour master was entirely beneath his notice."

"That was the line he took, was it?" said Merrion thoughtfully. "I wonder if there was more between those two than anyone else knew about?"

"What could there have been between them?" Arnold asked.

"Almost anything. The scheme for turning Brenthithe into a commercial port, for instance. That scheme is supposed to have been Stanlake's. But suppose it wasn't?"

"What in the world are you getting at now?"

"I'm only letting my imagination out of its kennel for a little run. Suppose that Pottern was the originator of the scheme which he fathered upon Stanlake?"

"If the scheme was his, why father it upon some one else?"

"Because he couldn't very well introduce it himself. The scheme would have benefited nobody more than the Brent Royal Cement Company. Pottern, besides being chairman of the Harbour Commissioners, is a director of that company. As chairman he couldn't very well initiate a scheme which would be so obviously to his personal advantage. So he picked upon Stanlake to push his scheme forward for him. And from all we hear he couldn't have made a more suitable choice."

"He told me this morning that if Stanlake had lived the scheme would have gone through," Arnold remarked.

"Well, that's as may be. My point is this. If Pottern and Stanlake were working in collusion, fairly frequent meetings between them would have been necessary. Suspicion might have been aroused if they had met openly. But either Pottern or his emissary could slip quietly round to Stanlake's rooms for a chat when Bickton had been packed off to the pictures."

"Here, hold on!" Arnold exclaimed. "By your own showing Pottern would be the very last man to have any motive for murdering Stanlake."

"Never mind, I said that we weren't going to consider motive at this stage. You asked me to suggest the nature of possible secret appointments at

Stanlake's rooms, and I've done so. Give me time and I'll suggest another dozen plausible conspiracies."

"That one will do for the present," Arnold replied hastily.

"Very well. Then you'll admit that some person or persons unknown may have visited Stanlake's rooms more than once without Bickton's knowledge?"

"Yes, I'll admit that. I seem to remember saying something of the kind myself."

"Right. The next question is, when did Jones abstract the pistol? And here we are presented with quite a pretty little problem. How often did Stanlake have occasion to go into the boxroom? He kept his tools there, we know. On the day of his death he went into the room twice, once to get a screw-driver for Bickton, and the second time to fetch the bag of tools before he went out. On the whole, I think we must assume that he went into the room fairly frequently, at least once or twice a week.

"Now we must credit Stanlake with at least normal powers of observation. Sooner or later, in the course of his visits to the room, he would have noticed that the pistol was missing. The longer the interval between the theft of the pistol and his death, the greater his chance of noticing it. And he certainly never did notice it, for if he had he would have kicked up a fuss and Bickton would have heard all about it."

"That isn't the sort of reasoning that would appeal to a jury," Arnold remarked.

"I daresay not. But it's logical all the same. I'm inclined to think that Jones took the pistol quite a short time—say a week—before the crime.

"Having secured the pistol, Jones prepared the ammunition for it. He had next to entice Stanlake to some lonely spot at which to shoot him. The end of the jetty was in every way suitable, and Stanlake could be lured there by the simple expedient of putting his tide-gauge out of order. So far it's all fairly simple. But I'm bound to confess that at the next stage of the proceedings, I come unstuck."

"Surely your imagination hasn't let you down?"

"It has, though, and I'll explain why. I've demonstrated to my satisfaction, if not to yours, the extreme probability that the wires of the tide-gauge were cut about half-past ten on Monday night. After he had done that Jones could go to bed with a clear conscience, for no one could see until

daylight next morning that the concern wasn't working. But after that time, he couldn't possibly tell when Stanlake would take action. The fact that the gauge wasn't working might have been reported to Stanlake at any time during Tuesday, and he might have started off at once to see what was the matter. And what would Jones have done if Stanlake had walked down the jetty in broad daylight? Shot him then and there in full view, not only from the parade, but from any of the small boats lying in Bollard Bay? You'll never get me to believe that. However much the New Town people may have sympathised with his action, some one or other would have been bound to give him away.

"Did Jones in any way influence the time of Stanlake's expedition? There doesn't seem to be any evidence that he did. Unless, of course, it was Jones himself who contrived that the breakdown should be brought to Stanlake's notice. According to Bickton it was reported from the Yacht Club. That's a clue that might be worth following up."

"I'm going to talk to Major Metfield to-morrow in any case," said Arnold grimly.

"I should, if I were you. But don't forget that he's a member himself. For the moment let's get back to Jones. You'd have expected that having arranged for the murder to look like a suicide, he'd have laid down the pistol neatly by Stanlake's cap when he'd finished the job. That would have been the final artistic touch."

"I wondered myself why he chucked the pistol into the sea," Arnold remarked.

"Well, here's a theory for you. Jones meant to leave the pistol on the jetty where it was bound to be found. But you remember what Whitford told us about that back-flash. It must have pretty well scared Jones out of his wits. He obeyed his natural impulse and flung the pistol away. That's how it came to be found where it was. Jones no doubt scuttled back to his base of operation to butter his burnt face. You will recognise him by that when you meet him."

"Do you expect me to make a house to house search through the New Town for a man with a burnt face?"

"It would hardly be worth while, I fancy. Jones has probably gone to earth somewhere until his eyelashes have grown again. And now I vote we go to bed, for I'm getting confoundedly sleepy."

But in spite of his desire for sleep, Merrion spent a restless night. The wind, whistling through his open window, reminded him of the unforgotten war days when he had served as an officer in the navy. Memory chased memory through his brain, banishing anything but a fitful and disturbed sleep. And at the sound of a distant shout, he started up in bed and switched on the light. A glance at his watch showed him that it was half-past three in the morning. The shout was repeated, urgent and panic-stricken, seeming to come from the direction of Bollard Bay.

Merrion leapt out of bed and ran to the window. This looked out towards the harbour, but the view was restricted by the houses between Atlantic Avenue and the Parade. Merrion could see the light at the end of the jetty, winking fitfully through the curtain of a rain-squall. Here and there above the surface of the water in Bollard Bay were a few tiny specks of light, seeming hardly brighter than so many fire-flies. Merrion knew these to be the riding lights of small craft lying there.

Apart from these lights, dim and flickering in the driving rain, everything was in complete darkness. The wind was still blowing strongly from the south-east, bringing with it a pall of clouds which utterly obscured the moon and stars. It was undoubtedly the darkest period of the night, some two hours or more before sunrise. And, in the all-pervading gloom, something was happening on the usually peaceful waters of Bollard Bay.

Merrion had very little difficulty in guessing what was the matter. Under the influence of the wind and the rising tide setting straight into the entrance of the bay, some vessel there had dragged her anchor and was fouling others before she could be got under control. Hence the warning shouts which he had heard. There was nothing that he could do about it, and he was on the point of getting back into bed when a chorus of angry voices, borne faintly on the wind, reached his ears. Merely a single vessel dragging her anchor could hardly cause so much commotion. It occurred to him that something more serious must be in progress. He put on his dressing-gown and slippers, went next door and with some difficulty aroused Arnold.

The Inspector, thus unceremoniously awakened, blinked at him sleepily. “Hallo, what do you want?” he demanded. “It’s not time to get up yet, surely?”

“It’s only half-past three,” Merrion replied. “But there’s a devil of a hullabaloo going on in Bollard Bay. Something pretty serious must be worrying the yachtsmen lying there.”

"Well, what about it?" Arnold grumbled. "It's no business of mine. I'm a detective, not a coast-guard. Run away and man the local lifeboat, or whatever is the proper thing to do on these occasions, and leave me to sleep in peace. And don't forget to switch the light off as you go."

Merrion, thus dismissed, returned to his own room and once more looked out of the window. The rain-squall had passed, leaving the night as dark as ever but a trifle clearer. The jetty light winked uninterruptedly, but the smaller lights had disappeared from his field of vision. The noise of shouting, though seemingly more distant, had risen to a continuous clamour.

Merrion's curiosity overpowered him and he began to dress hastily. As he did so, he excused himself by the reflection that he wouldn't have gone to sleep again anyhow. He might just as well go and find out the cause of all this disturbance.

He left the Lord Rodney and hurried down Atlantic Avenue to the Parade. Apparently the shouting had not aroused the inhabitants of this part of the New Town, for, as far as he could see, the front was deserted. A few scattered lamp standards illuminated the wet concrete and the strip of beach below it, but nothing more. Merrion stood still and listened. The shouting seemed to come from the head of the bay, where a group of riding lights shone like a constellation of minor stars. Above them the distant leading light gleamed and occulted with unruffled regularity.

Merrion started at a brisk pace along the Parade towards the head of the bay. Before he had gone many paces his quick ears caught the sound of a single voice shouting incoherently, comparatively near at hand. The voice came from the water, and very soon he could hear the hurried splash of oars.

A moving spot appeared in the edge of the circle of light, quickly resolving itself into the shape of a yacht's dinghy. Its occupant was rowing frantically towards the beach and shouting hoarsely between his strokes. Merrion jumped from the Parade on to the beach and ran down to meet the dinghy as it grounded.

The occupant of the dinghy fell out with the force of the impact, picked himself up, and faced Merrion. He was wearing nothing but his vest and drawers and was obviously in a state of intense excitement. "Lummy, that was a near go!" he exclaimed. "I thought my number was up. Strike me pink, I did."

"Well, you're safe ashore now," said Merrion comfortingly. "What happened to you?"

"Blest if I know," the other replied helplessly. "I can't tell nothing about it, for I was lying down below asleep, see? All I know is that there was a blessed great bump which knocked me clean out of my bunk on to the floor. And when I got up on deck it was as dark as pitch, but not so dark that I couldn't see that her bows were all stove in and that the water was pouring into her. She's at the bottom by this time, or my name's not Jack Rogers."

"Was there anyone else on board?" Merrion asked sharply.

"Who else would there be?" Rogers demanded. "You wouldn't find the governor spending the night on board if he could help it. No, nor none of his family either. They'll all be tucked up comfy in their beds for sure, you may bet. It's Jack Rogers that has to stay aboard and risk being drowned like that."

"Who's your employer?" Merrion asked.

"Why, Mr. Grimstead that lives up in Granville Terrace. I'm his jack-of-all-trades, I am. Drive his car, clean his boots, and look after the engine of his motor-cruiser when she's in commission. *Ianthe* her name is, and what the governor will say when he learns that she's at the bottom of the bay is more than I can tell."

"What was it that hit you?"

"Darned if I can say. Didn't I tell you that it was that dark out there you couldn't see a hand in front of your face? It must have been something mighty heavy, that's all I know. Her bows were all stove in just as though they'd been so much brown paper. I don't know who you may be, but it won't hurt you to bear me a hand to haul the dinghy up above high water mark. Then I'll be off up to Granville Terrace to tell the governor what's happened."

Merrion helped Rogers to haul up the dinghy. The latter then departed on his dolorous errand, and Merrion once more set off along the Parade towards the head of the bay.

As he approached his goal he heard sounds of the utmost confusion. A number of men seemed to be shouting at the top of their voices, a clamour rising above the sound of the waves breaking on the shingle. As he reached the scene of the disturbance someone brought out a motor-car and directed the headlights on to the edge of the water.

A most amazing spectacle was thus revealed. A couple of dozen or more yachts, ranging from six metres and motor-cruisers down to sailing dinghies, had apparently been driven in a compact mass to the head of the bay, where

they were now bumping alarmingly on the hard bottom. A number of men, some on board the yachts, others waist-deep in the water, were doing their utmost to keep the craft apart and clear of the beach. Their task, as Merrion saw from the first, was utterly hopeless. Every moment minor collisions occurred, with resulting damage to hull or rigging. Spars snapped, shrouds parted with the twang of a bow-string. And one by one the vessels grounded on the beach, to be heaved over bodily by the force of the wind and waves.

Nothing effective could be done until day broke, as Merrion saw. He busied himself in salving such bits of wreckage as came ashore within the range of the headlights and hauling them up the beach out of harm's way. And as he did so, he puzzled his brains over the cause of the disaster. It was understandable that three or four craft insecurely moored should have dragged their anchors. The wind and sea alone would account for that. But nothing short of a whole gale could sweep a flotilla like this from its moorings and drive it ashore. Something very much out of the ordinary must have taken place.

The first grey streaks of dawn solved the mystery. A hundred yards or so from the beach a squat black form became visible, looking enormous in the uncertain light. Merrion stared at it until its nature became revealed. It was an old and very dilapidated wooden lighter, about a hundred feet long and broad in proportion. Being apparently half-full of water, it must have drawn at least eight feet and had therefore grounded at a considerable distance from the beach.

The presence of this lighter explained the matter. It had obviously drifted into the mouth of Bollard Bay, up which it had been impelled by the wind. In its course it had sunk *Ianthe* and possibly other craft, and swept the rest irresistibly from their moorings.

As the light grew the crowd of spectators on the beach increased in size. Merrion recognised Major Metfield, and could hear him holding forth to a group of sympathisers. It seemed that his boat was among the badly-damaged craft, and his indignation knew no bounds. It was a case of criminal carelessness on someone's part. The owner of the lighter would have to pay for the damage, and a pretty sum it would be. The regatta on Saturday would have to be abandoned and that would mean a serious loss to the town. Why, more than half of the yachts that had been lying in the bay were damaged to a greater or less extent.

Merrion, surveying the scene, was bound to agree with this last statement. No more than a dozen or so of the small craft which had filled the

bay on the previous evening were still riding at anchor. The lighter in its destructive course had swept a wide lane the whole length of the bay.

It was by now half-past five. The tide had already turned and was visibly beginning to ebb. A few fortunate owners had managed to extricate their boats from the confusion and were now busily engaged in towing them into deeper water. A few dinghys had been hauled up on to the beach for examination of the damage they had sustained. But the rest were hopelessly aground, listing at all angles and displaying broken spars and battered topsides.

Matters might have been even worse for these but for two factors. In the first place the wind was abating, and in the second the grounded lighter acted as a breakwater. Even so, Merrion could see that the great majority of the damaged craft could not hope to take part in the regatta on the following day.

The sun had not yet risen, but the light was increasing with a rapidity which made fresh detail progressively visible. A voice spoke at Merrion's shoulder. "That's a proper mess-up and no mistake, Mr. Merrion."

He recognised Mr. Ogston. "Hallo, so you've come out to see the fun, too, have you?" he asked.

"I heard a lot of people running down the street, so I turned out to see what was the matter," Ogston replied. "I never saw the likes of this before. However did that lighter come to drift into the bay like that?"

"That's what I've been asking myself for the last half-hour. Can she have been towing down the coast, got adrift somehow, and been driven in here?"

Ogston shook his head. "That's not it," he replied. "That lighter belongs here. If you look closely you can see *B.R.C.Co. No. 4* painted on her bows."

"So I can. But what do the initials stand for?"

"Brent Royal Cement Company. That's who she belongs to. They used to use her for bringing cement down from the works to the wharf. But she got too old and leaky, I suppose, and they bought some new steel lighters two or three years back. Since then, they haven't used this one and she's lain in the upper harbour above the chain ferry."

"Above the chain ferry!" Merrion exclaimed. "Then how the dickens did she come to drift in here?"

"That's more than I can say; but there she lies, for all the world to see."

"But man, it's fantastic!" Merrion persisted. "She would have had to come down the whole length of the lower harbour. She can't have done that in daylight yesterday evening, or someone would have been bound to see her and raise the alarm."

"Then she must have drifted down after dark."

"No, that at least is quite impossible. Look here. It was high water this morning at ten minutes to five. That means it was low water last night somewhere about half-past ten. In other words, during practically the whole of the hours of darkness, the tide was running up the harbour. The wind has been blowing from the south-east all night. Yet, according to you, that lighter drifted a mile and more down the harbour against both tide and wind. And I utterly refuse to believe that the thing's possible."

Ogston shrugged his shoulders. "You know more about these things than I do, Mr. Merrion," he said. "All I can say is that lighter belongs to the cement company, and she's been lying up on the mud above the chain ferry these last two or three years, and there she is now."

Merrion frowned at the offending lighter. If Ogston's facts were correct, what possible explanation could they bear? And then as the sun appeared above the eastern horizon, a shaft of light struck the derelict craft. The faded lettering became suddenly distinct, *B.R.C.Co. No. 4*.

But underneath the initials something had been scribbled in chalk. Merrion stared at this, trying to decipher the scrawling letters. Then suddenly he grasped Ogston by the shoulders.

"By jove, just look at that!" he exclaimed softly.

Ogston looked in the required direction. "What's that?" he asked. "There's something been written up on the lighter's side. C.A.P. . . . Why, its CAPTAIN STANLAKE!"

"That's just what it is," Merrion agreed. "Well, we can't do any good here, I'm all for going back to the Lord Rodney, where I dare say you can put a kettle on for a cup of tea."

CHAPTER IX

OPINIONS AT THE YACHT CLUB

It was just after six o'clock when Merrion woke Arnold for the second time that morning.

"Sorry, but you'll have to sit up and take notice," he said. "Ogston has promised to bring up a cup of tea in a few minutes, and that will help to pull you together. Thanks to your slothful habits you've missed quite a lot of excitement, let me tell you."

"I find plenty of excitement in life without getting up in the middle of the night to look for it," Arnold replied; "but I suppose if you won't let me sleep in peace I shall have to listen to what it's all about."

Merrion described what had happened. "So far as I can hear nobody's been hurt," he concluded. "I spoke to one excited survivor who imagined that he had had a miraculous escape from drowning. But I don't think he was ever in very great danger."

"Then what's all the fuss about?" Arnold demanded peevishly.

"Even though no one has been hurt, the damage done is considerable. It'll probably run into hundreds if not thousands of pounds. And I'm not at all sure how the insurance companies will look at the matter. Further than that, Brenthithe Regatta, which, as you probably know, was fixed for to-morrow, is completely wiped off the slate."

"Well, accidents will happen, I suppose," Arnold remarked placidly.

"They happen much more effectively when there's a human agency behind them," Merrion replied. "You don't suppose that lighter drifted into Bollard Bay by accident, do you?"

Arnold yawned. "I don't suppose anything about it. I am completely ignorant on the subject of lighters and their habits of drifting."

"Well, you can take it from me that they don't drift against wind and tide. That lighter was deliberately brought down from the harbour. And the

name that's been chalked upon her side explains the whole thing."

Arnold began to display symptoms of interest. "Go ahead," he said. "Let's have your theory of what happened."

"Ah, you're tumbling to it at last, are you? You heard what that chap called out at the inquest yesterday. That's proof enough that some of the locals believe that Stanlake was murdered by someone from the New Town. And they feel pretty bitter about it, too. Not because they felt any great personal love for Stanlake, perhaps, but because he was a symbol. Stanlake represented the harbour and its interests as against the encroachment of the New Town.

"It's easy to understand the desire of these chaps to get something of their own back. To avenge Stanlake's murder by damaging the New Town in some way. If they'd been landsmen, they would probably have started a riot and thrown stones through a few windows. But, being used to the water, they took their revenge in another and aquatic way. And a pretty effective revenge it was, it seems to me. You must remember that most of those small craft belonged to people in the New Town, and that it is the shopkeepers and so forth in the New Town who benefit from the regatta.

"The police will have to make inquiries, of course, but I don't envy them their job. This affair isn't the work of one man, or of half a dozen for that matter. It must have taken quite a gang of chaps to bring that lighter from her moorings on the mud above the chain ferry down the harbour against wind and tide. Of course, once they got her clear of the end of the jetty they could let her loose and make themselves scarce. There are probably dozens of folk in the Old Town in the secret, but I'll bet you you won't find anyone who'll admit that he knows anything about it."

"I didn't come down here to investigate a case of malicious damage," said Arnold firmly.

"I know you didn't," Merrion replied; "but you'll be dragged into it, there's not the slightest doubt about that. Your friend Major Metfield's boat is among the wreckage, and from what I overheard of his conversation just now, he isn't a bit pleased about it. He's absolutely certain to invoice your expert aid in bringing the culprits to justice."

"After all, the affair may have been an accident," said Arnold. "You can't definitely prove that it wasn't."

Merrion shook his head. "You'd better get that idea out of your head before you start," he said. "Apart from the possibility of the lighter having

drifted down the harbour by herself, how do you account for Stanlake's name being chalked upon her side? That was a very happy thought of someone's, you must admit. Stanlake, reincarnated as a lighter, wreaks his vengeance upon the New Town in general and the Yacht Club in particular. The spirit of the late Harbour Master is not yet laid, it appears.

"Seriously, though, the matter as I see it concerns you directly. It is very definitely the offshoot of a case which you are investigating. And it means, I'm afraid, that for the future the case will be complicated by a cloud of prejudice. You won't find an unbiased witness in the whole of Brenthithe. Every statement you obtain will be weighted in one direction or the other, according to the side which your informant takes in the conflict between the Old Town and the New."

A knock on the door forestalled Arnold's reply. Mr. Ogston appeared, grinning broadly. "I'm sorry to interrupt you gentlemen," he said, "but Major Metfield is down below asking for you, Inspector."

"What did I tell you?" Merrion murmured. But Arnold swore.

"Get out of here, both of you, and let me dress!" he exclaimed. "And tell Major Metfield that I'll be with him in five minutes."

The Inspector was as good as his word. Within the stipulated time, he was closeted with the Chief Constable in the back room of the Lord Rodney. Major Metfield was seething with indignation.

"It's outrageous!" he exclaimed, "it's an act of piracy, if not worse. Why, it's impossible to estimate the amount of damage that's been done. My own boat has her port garboard strake stove in, and it'll be a long and expensive job to make her seaworthy again. Grimstead's *Ianthe* is at the bottom of the bay, and his mechanic had the narrowest possible escape from being drowned. Dewsbury's *White Lilac* is badly damaged, and naturally, as Commodore of the Yacht Club, he wants to know what we're going to do about it. It's very fortunate that you happen to be on the spot, Inspector, to help us in bringing these criminals to justice."

It was obvious to Arnold that Major Metfield's wrath at the damage sustained by his boat had made him oblivious to all other issues. But for the moment the only policy was to humour him.

"Of course, sir, I'm ready to give you any assistance in my power," the Inspector replied; "but as a total stranger to this town I'm not nearly so favourably placed as your own officers. From what I have already heard I gather that the damage is malicious and not accidental."

"Malicious!" exclaimed Major Metfield. "Criminal, that's what it is. A gang of rogues must have taken the lighter from its moorings, brought it down the harbour and left it to drift down on the boats in Bollard Bay. And, not content with that, they had the insolence to chalk the name of Captain Stanlake on the side of the lighter."

"Do you regard that fact as significant, sir?" Arnold asked.

"I do," replied Major Metfield emphatically. "I regard it as a proof that certain people in Brenthithe are dissatisfied that the murderer of Captain Stanlake has not yet been brought to book."

This was a direct thrust, but Arnold was quick to see the opportunity it gave him. "I'm doing my best to trace the murderer, sir," he replied respectfully. "Perhaps it would be best if I concentrated on that and left the task of finding those responsible for the damage to your officers."

To this Major Metfield gave a rather grudging consent. Arnold improved the occasion by giving him a brief account of the investigations which had been carried out the previous day, resulting in the discovery and identification of the weapon.

"As you will see, sir, there is still a possibility that Captain Stanlake shot himself," he concluded.

"Shot himself? Nonsense!" Major Metfield exclaimed forcibly. "If you had known him you wouldn't have made such a ridiculous suggestion. No, Inspector, you may take it from me that he was murdered by someone who imagined he had a personal grudge against him. One of those infernal rascals from the Old Town, I haven't a doubt. Folk who'd do a dastardly thing like setting that lighter adrift wouldn't stop at murder. Those slums at the other side of the harbour are a regular hot-bed of crime, and I rely upon you to help me clean them out." And with that, much to Arnold's relief, the Chief Constable took his departure.

Very shortly afterwards Merrion appeared. "Mrs. Ogston is getting us some breakfast," he said. "I can smell the bacon frying. Well, how does our friend the Chief Constable view the situation?"

"Hardly with what I've heard you call philosophic calm," Arnold replied. "According to him the Old Town is infested with pirates to whom murder is the merest trifle in the day's work."

"I'm not surprised," said Merrion. "I warned you not to expect impartiality from anyone. There'll be some tempers lost before this case is over. What's your next move?"

"As soon as I've had breakfast I'm going round to the Yacht Club to see the Secretary. Bickton told us that he and Stanlake had quarrelled, you remember."

"That's not much to go by. Stanlake's principal source of relaxation seems to have been quarrelling with people. For instance, we are told that he had words with Captain Frimley of the *Fulmar* only the night before his death."

"Yes, but the *Fulmar* was on the high seas when he was shot, so Frimley can't have done it. On the other hand, Holden, the Secretary, was presumably at the Yacht Club, which commands an excellent view of the end of the jetty. And I haven't forgotten that it was the people at the Yacht Club who reported that the tide-gauge was out of order."

Arnold adhered to his plans. Directly after breakfast he went to the Yacht Club, where he asked to see the Secretary, and was shown into his office. Mr. Holden was an elderly man with an apologetic manner. He was obviously very much harassed by the events of the morning, and at the Inspector's first mention of Captain Stanlake was unable to determine whether he referred to the deceased Harbour Master or to the lighter.

"I hope you'll be able to trace those responsible for this wicked action," he said.

"My business is to discover who shot Captain Stanlake," Arnold replied firmly. "I understand that you were acquainted with him."

"Acquainted?" replied Mr. Holden in some embarrassment. "Oh, er—yes. We were not on any terms of intimacy, you know. In fact, I may say in confidence that he was a very difficult man to get on with, very difficult indeed."

"You called upon him at his rooms in High Street, did you not?"

"I did so once, but it was an experience I was not anxious to repeat. I was treated with the greatest discourtesy, not only personally, but as an official of the Yacht Club. The incident produced a most disagreeable impression on the Committee when I reported it."

"What was your object in calling upon Captain Stanlake?"

"Well, you see, the Committee had decided to offer him honorary membership of the Club. Captain Robinson, his predecessor and a most charming man, had been an honorary member, and the Committee thought that the new Harbour Master should be offered the same courtesy. I was

instructed to interview him and convey the invitation. But the way that Captain Stanlake treated it almost defies description. He was not only rude but distressingly profane. He used language which I could not bring myself to repeat to the Committee when I reported to them the result of my interview. I am utterly at a loss to understand what induced Mr. Pottern to appoint such an ungracious person to the post of Harbour Master."

Arnold pricked up his ears at this. "It was the Harbour Commissioners who appointed him, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, of course," said Mr. Holden hastily. "In theory, it was certainly the Harbour Commissioners. They appointed a selection committee to interview the various applicants for the post. It was a committee of three, of whom Mr. Pottern was one. But I happen to know on the best authority that the other two members never attended any of the sittings."

"In other words the appointment was made by Mr. Pottern alone?" Arnold remarked.

"It amounted to that, and I have never been able to understand the reason for his choice. Apart from anything else, Captain Stanlake was hardly of the social standing expected of the Harbour Master of a place like this."

"Mr. Pottern, I understand, was already acquainted with Captain Stanlake? He had been a passenger on board a ship on which Stanlake was first officer."

Mr. Holden glanced sharply at the Inspector. "May I ask who told you that?" he asked.

Arnold scented some hidden mystery in the secretary's manner. "Why, Mr. Pottern told me so himself," he replied. "It's no secret, I suppose?"

"The fact that he went for a trip in the *Cistercian* is no secret," Mr. Holden replied. "Did Mr. Pottern happen to mention my name in that connection?"

"Not so far as I can recollect," Arnold replied, wondering where in the world all this was leading to.

Holden shook his head gravely. "I thought not, I thought not," he said. Then, under the astonished eyes of the Inspector, he rose from his chair, shut and fastened the window, and locked the door.

"I think it only right that you should know the whole story," he continued in a hushed whisper. "Until this moment I have never breathed a

word of it to a soul. But my conscience tells me that it would be wrong to conceal any detail, however irrelevant, from the police."

"You're quite right, Mr. Holden," Arnold replied with as much gravity as he could command. "If you have anything to tell, it is only right that the police should hear it."

"I should not like to say anything to Major Metfield," Holden said. "Although he is our Chief Constable, he is also a personal friend of Mr. Pottern's, and if Mr. Pottern learnt that I had revealed his secret, it would be a very serious matter for me. His influence in Brenthithe is very far-reaching."

"You may rely upon my discretion," Arnold replied reassuringly.

Holden bowed his head in acknowledgment of this. "It was at my suggestion that Mr. Pottern booked his passage in the *Cistercian*," he announced dramatically.

"Indeed!" Arnold exclaimed as though vastly impressed. "So that you are indirectly responsible for Captain Stanlake's appointment here?"

"No, no, no!" Holden replied hurriedly. "I most emphatically disclaim all responsibility on that score. I merely suggested to Mr. Pottern that the *Cistercian* might suit his purpose. You see, Mr. Pottern is one of our members. He came to me one day and told me that his doctor had advised him to go on a sea voyage. He said that he had heard me speak of a friend of mine who was a captain on one of the big lines and asked me for my advice.

"As it happens, Captain Hawkes of the *Cistercian* is a distant connection of mine. We rarely meet, but for many years we have corresponded at fairly frequent intervals. So I suggested to Mr. Pottern that he should book a passage with the Monk Line, if possible in the *Cistercian*, where I knew that he would be well looked after. He took my advice, and I wrote to Captain Hawkes explaining that Mr. Pottern was a man of considerable influence and asking him to treat him accordingly."

Arnold with difficulty restrained a smile. "Captain Hawkes did so, of course," he inquired.

"Oh, I think so. In fact, I'm sure he did. But after the *Cistercian* had completed her round voyage and returned to Liverpool, I received a letter from him which shocked me profoundly. So much so that having read the letter several times, I thought it best to destroy it. And whenever Mr. Pottern asks me, as he does at frequent intervals, whether I have heard from Captain Hawkes, I always tell him that I haven't."

"What did you find so particularly shocking in his letter?"

"The terms in which Captain Hawkes referred to Mr. Pottern's conduct during the voyage. As you are doubtless aware, sea captains are not in the habit of mincing their words, and Captain Hawkes is no exception to this rule. In his very first sentence he spoke of Mr. Pottern as 'that pompous old hypocrite you saddled me with.'"

"Captain Hawkes was not apparently favourably impressed," Arnold remarked.

"He most certainly was not. And according to him, Mr. Pottern had—well, a most unfortunate experience in one of the Far Eastern ports at which the *Cistercian* called."

"An unfortunate experience? You mean that he was robbed, or something like that?"

"No, no, it was very much worse. I will spare you Captain Hawkes's somewhat lurid expressions and tell you the story in my own words. It appears that in this port Mr. Pottern went ashore one afternoon and had not returned by eleven o'clock that night. As the ship was to sail at midnight, Captain Hawkes began to get anxious, and at last sent his officers ashore to look for Mr. Pottern. Mr. Stanlake, as he was then, eventually found Mr. Pottern in a house of exceedingly bad repute, having drunk considerably more than was consistent with his dignity."

"A most unfortunate experience indeed," said Arnold controlling his laughter with difficulty. "It was discreet of you to keep that story to yourself, Mr. Holden."

"I should not have dreamed of repeating it in Brenthithe," Holden replied virtuously. "Mr. Pottern is very highly respected here, and any breath of scandal of such a nature would cause the greatest pain both to him and to his family." He lowered his voice to a scarcely audible whisper. "The only other person in Brenthithe who knew of the incident was Captain Stanlake. And I have often wondered whether it had any influence upon Mr. Pottern's selection of him for the vacant post of Harbour Master."

"You have been very frank with me, Mr. Holden, and you may rest assured that I shall respect your confidence. Now let us come to last Tuesday. You are aware, I believe, that the tide-gauge at the end of the jetty had broken down that day?"

"It was I who reported the matter to Captain Stanlake," said Holden with an air of importance. "I rang him up at his office and received a brusque, not

to say discourteous, reply."

"Were you the first to notice that the tide-gauge was not in order?"

"No, it was our Commodore, Sir Vincent Dewsbury. He had apparently been watching the gauge for the greater part of the afternoon and shortly after six o'clock he called me from this office. He pointed out the gauge to me and told me to report the matter to Captain Stanlake. As you may have noticed, the terrace of this building is exactly opposite the end of the jetty."

"Yes, I've noticed that. Did Captain Stanlake tell you when he proposed to inspect the gauge?"

"No, he merely told me that I could tell the Committee that the matter would be attended to. Not a word of regret for the inconvenience to which members had been put."

"Where were you at nine o'clock that evening, Mr. Holden?" Arnold asked abruptly.

"In the billiard-room of the Club House here. I'm sure of that, for I had been playing a hundred up with the marker. Just after we'd finished, Mr. Grimstead, one of our members, came in and I happened to look at the clock. It was then ten minutes past nine. And I remember Mr. Grimstead saying that it was a filthy evening and raining hard."

"Can you tell me if any of the members were sitting on the terrace at nine o'clock?"

"I really don't know. I certainly wasn't out there myself. If Mr. Grimstead was right about the rain, I think it most unlikely that anyone would have been out there."

At this moment heavy footsteps sounded beyond the door of the office and an instant later the handle was shaken violently. "Hallo!" a voice exclaimed, "the place is locked."

Holden leapt from his chair, scuttled across the room and turned the key.

"I'm so sorry, Sir Vincent," he said apologetically, as he opened the door. "I locked the door so as to be sure of being free from interruptions while I interviewed this gentleman. Allow me to introduce Inspector Arnold of Scotland Yard." He turned to Arnold. "This is Sir Vincent Dewsbury, our Commodore," he said, "and Mr. Grimstead, one of our members."

Arnold stood up and bowed as the two men came into the room.

"Glad to meet you, Inspector," said Dewsbury heartily. "Metfield told me you were down here. You're trying to find out who killed Stanlake, of course? Well, I'm no detective, but I'll bet some of those chaps down by the harbour know all about it. The same chaps that let that confounded lighter drift into the bay, I dare say."

"Captain Stanlake doesn't seem to have been over-popular in the New Town," replied Arnold quietly.

"Oh, you've found that out already, have you?" said Dewsbury. "I shouldn't like to say too much against the poor fellow now that he's dead; but we all of us cordially disliked both the man and his methods. Isn't that so, Grimstead?"

Grimstead, thus appealed to, nodded in agreement. "I'll go further than that," he replied. "I'll say that Stanlake was an unmannerly brute, and that if he'd had his way he'd have ruined the town and everybody in it."

Dewsbury laughed. "If you talk like that, the Inspector will think that we shot him between us to get him out of the way," he said. "But you've got to look at the other side of the question. I'm convinced that Stanlake, whatever his faults, was perfectly sincere in his ambition. And I never heard of a Harbour Master being murdered for doing what he considered to be his duty."

Arnold made no reply to this. "When you gentlemen came in, I was just asking Mr. Holden whether any members of the Club were on the terrace at nine o'clock on Tuesday evening," he said. "Captain Stanlake walked along the jetty just before that time and he should have been visible from the terrace."

Grimstead shook his head. "I doubt it," he said. "It was raining heavily at nine o'clock, though it stopped a few minutes afterwards. I left home shortly before nine o'clock and got here at ten minutes past, so I know. Squally, you know. In fact, I thought of sending out to my man and telling him to run my boat up the harbour for shelter."

"Bad luck, that!" said Dewsbury sympathetically. "You've heard about this morning's affair, of course, Inspector? My *White Lilac* was pretty well knocked about but Mr. Grimstead's *Ianthe* was holed and sunk."

"Yes, I've heard about that," Arnold replied. "Where was your boat lying on Tuesday night, Mr. Grimstead?"

"In the same place as she was last night," Grimstead replied. "Close in to the end of the jetty. That's why she was the first to be hit by that confounded

lighter."

"Was there anyone on board her at the time?"

"There should have been. My man Rogers always sleeps aboard her when she's lying out in the bay. I'm not taking the risk of those confounded fishermen snooping round in the dark and pinching anything they can lay their hands upon. It's my belief that if Rogers had had his wits about him last night, he could have started her up and beached her before she sank."

"I expect the bump she got when that lighter hit her frightened the life out of him," Dewsbury remarked.

"He was certainly in a state of panic when he knocked me up and told me what had happened," Grimstead agreed. "According to his own account, he had such a narrow escape from drowning that nothing but neat whisky would restore his shattered nerves."

"Drowning!" Dewsbury exclaimed. "Why, I thought that Rogers was the champion swimmer of Brenthithe."

"So he is. But his story is that he was nearly trapped in the fo'c'sle before he could get out. Whether or not he was exaggerating he certainly had had a pretty bad fright."

"Is he a reliable man, Mr. Grimstead?" Arnold asked.

"It depends what you mean by reliable. He's been with me five years and he's always kept my car and *Ianthe's* engines in perfect order. On the other hand, I have had my suspicions that when he's off duty, he isn't always as sober as he might be. But since he suits me very well in other ways, I don't ask too many questions."

"You find him a good mechanic?" Arnold asked idly.

"That's one of his chief virtues. He was an engineer's fitter before he came to me, and I never met anyone handier with tools. I rigged him up with a workshop beside my garage and since then he's done all the repairs I've wanted, either ashore or afloat."

"You say he was on board your boat close to the end of the jetty when Captain Stanlake was killed? He must surely have heard or seen something?"

Grimstead smiled. "I said that he should have been," he replied. "He's supposed to go aboard at sunset in time to light the riding light, and to stay aboard until next morning. Whether he is always strictly punctual, or

whether he sometimes lingers in a pub ashore, I don't know. I've never inquired too closely. But I did notice that I couldn't see *Ianthe's* riding light when I walked along the Parade about nine o'clock on Tuesday night. And if you look at the almanack you will see that the sun set between eight and half-past that day."

"Would Rogers have recognised Stanlake if he had seen him on the jetty?"

"Oh, he'd have recognised him all right. Everyone who had anything to do with the water here had reason to know Stanlake. He was always butting in and making himself a nuisance. Besides, he and Stanlake had a dust-up of some kind about a couple of months ago."

"What was that about?" Arnold asked.

"Quite frankly, Inspector, I don't know. Stanlake wrote a letter of complaint to me at the time, but it was so offensive that I tore it up and swore I wouldn't take any notice of it. In effect he told me that if I couldn't keep my servants in order, he'd take the job on for me. But I'll admit that I made a few discreet inquiries subsequently, and I don't think there's much doubt that Rogers was in the wrong."

"I've never heard this yarn, Grimstead," Dewsbury remarked.

"No, I kept it to myself, for I didn't want to cause trouble. What happened, it appears, was this. I was going up to London for two or three days, and as I shouldn't be wanting *Ianthe* I told Rogers to take her up the harbour to her moorings above the chain ferry. Rogers took her up that same evening, but on his way up the harbour he suddenly felt thirsty, I suppose. Anyhow, he tied *Ianthe* up alongside the ferry steps and went into the Topsail Schooner for a drink."

"In direct contravention of the Harbour Master's order that no vessels were to be tied up on that side of the harbour," Dewsbury remarked.

"Exactly. Well, while Rogers was in the Topsail Schooner one of the harbour men came in and told him that he'd get into trouble if he left *Ianthe* where she was much longer. Rogers seems to have resented this, and the end of it was that he said he'd go and find the adjectived Harbour Master and tell him what he thought of him. I gather that he found him, too, but what actually passed between them is more than I can tell you."

"He's not the only man in Brenthithe who'd quarrelled with Stanlake," said Dewsbury. "That illustrates what I told you just now, Inspector. You've

only got to take a walk round the harbour to find dozens of men who had their knives into Stanlake."

"And yet I understand that he was popular with the fishermen," Arnold objected.

Dewsbury shook his head. "Don't you believe it," he replied. "Stanlake wasn't really popular with any one. He was far too much of a blusterer. 'Get out of my way or I'll knock you down.' You know the sort of chap. The fishermen didn't like the man, though they may have liked his scheme. He was going to build a new wharf for them on this side of the harbour, a thing they've been agitating for, for years. If you take my tip, it's by combing out the Old Town that you'll find the murderer."

CHAPTER X

SAGA OF JACK ROGERS

As Arnold left the Yacht Club, he found Merrion sitting on the Parade, smoking a cigarette and looking thoughtfully out across Bollard Bay.

"Hallo!" he said as the Inspector accosted him. "Had a good time? The tide's falling fast now and it will be low water in a couple of hours or so. You see that mast sticking out of the water by the end of the jetty there? That'll be Mr. Grimstead's *Ianthe*, I expect."

"I've just been talking to Mr. Grimstead," Arnold replied. "What did you think of his man Rogers when you saw him this morning?"

"Not a terrible lot. He was completely panic-stricken, and I had the impression that he'd been drinking pretty heavily overnight. Why?"

"Because I've heard a lot of interesting things about him. I'll repeat them to you later when I've had a chance of talking to the chap myself."

"He'll be down here before very long, I expect. I've been chatting with the locals and hearing all the gossip. Grimstead has arranged for a barge to come along at low water and start salving *Ianthe*. If Rogers' nerves have recovered by then, he'll be on the spot, sure enough."

"How far do you reckon that mast is from the end of the jetty?"

"Twenty or thirty yards, I dare say. *Ianthe* must have been lying right in the path of that lighter as she started to drift into the bay."

"According to her owner she was lying in the same place on Tuesday night," said Arnold significantly. "And Rogers was, or should have been, on board her at nine o'clock."

"So that's the reason of your sudden interest in my acquaintance of this morning, is it? It sounds as if he might have something to tell us. Did you pick up any other items of information?"

"I heard rather a queer story, which if it's true throws a somewhat lurid light upon the reason for Stanlake's appointment as Harbour Master here.

Without going into details, it seems that Stanlake knew something not altogether to Mr. Pottern's credit."

"Blackmail, eh?" asked Merrion quickly.

"I don't suppose that it ever went as far as that, exactly. But Stanlake was in possession of certain facts which Pottern was most anxious should not become known locally. Stanlake may have had the chance of suggesting to him that his silence could be bought, not with money but with an appointment ashore."

"And now Stanlake is dead and his mouth shut for ever," said Merrion thoughtfully. "That must be some consolation to Pottern for the loss of his highly efficient Harbour Master. Well, well, it's all very confusing. Ah, here comes my friend of this morning. I'll introduce you, if you like."

He beckoned to a man dressed in a blue suit with brass buttons who was approaching along the Parade. "Hallo, Rogers, you haven't forgotten me already, have you?" he said.

Rogers looked at him for a moment and then touched his cap. "I didn't know you for the moment, sir," he replied. "You're the gentleman who helped me haul up my dinghy after *Ianthe* had been sunk."

"That's right," said Merrion cheerfully. "Always ready to help a shipwrecked mariner, you know. Don't go away for a moment. This is my friend Inspector Arnold from Scotland Yard. I'm sure he'd like to have a chat with you."

Rogers glanced at Arnold suspiciously. "I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but I'll have to stand by with the dinghy. Mr. Grimstead's got a barge coming along at low water and we're going to see if we can raise *Ianthe*."

"The barge isn't here yet and there's an hour or more before low water. Sit down on this bench, and when you see the barge coming you can jump into the dinghy and push off."

Rogers obeyed, but without any great display of enthusiasm, Arnold turned to him. "You're Mr. Grimstead's chauffeur, I understand?" he asked.

"Chauffeur, chief engineer, mechanic and pretty well everything else," Rogers replied. "With the job of skipper of *Ianthe* thrown in, and all for two pound ten a week."

"You can handle *Ianthe* single-handed?" Merrion asked.

"Easy enough. She's got her controls led into the cockpit, handy to the steering wheel."

"Very convenient," said Merrion with a glance at Arnold. "What was it you were going to ask Rogers, Inspector?"

"I was going to ask him how long *Ianthe* had been lying off the end of the jetty," Arnold replied.

"Pretty well all the summer, off and on. You take my meaning. Most days Mr. Grimstead would take her out for a cruise, but he'd always bring her back to the same place, there or thereabouts. And if it threatened to blow from the south-eastwards or Mr. Grimstead wasn't wanting her for a few days, I had orders to take her up to her moorings above the chain ferry."

"Is there any particular reason for always lying in the same place?" Merrion asked.

"It's the best anchorage in the whole of the bay, just off the end of the jetty there. There's plenty of water and no fear of touching the ground even at low water springs. And the holding ground's good and clean, too."

"*Ianthe* wasn't lying there yesterday afternoon round about high water," Merrion remarked. "I happen to know that, for I spent some little time myself on the jetty."

"That's right, sir. Mr. Grimstead and some friends of his took her out just before lunch, and they weren't back till six or later."

"But she was there last Tuesday evening?" Arnold asked.

"She's been there every night this week, as I know well enough, for I've been sleeping aboard of her."

"You remember Tuesday evening well enough, I dare say?"

"I don't know that I remember it particularly. Wait a bit, though. I do recollect that it was raining heavens hard when I went aboard that evening."

"What time was that?"

"I couldn't say for certain. It must have been getting on for nine o'clock, for I was a bit later than usual that evening."

"What made you late?"

"Well, I'd been out all day for one thing. And for another I was sitting in the bar of the Frigate, over yonder, and didn't notice the time."

"They know you at the Frigate, I suppose?"

"They ought to by this time. I've used it for a good many years now, for it's the best pub anywhere near the front."

"You say you'd been out all day. What do you mean by that exactly?"

"Why, I'd driven Mrs. Grimstead and the eldest young lady to a gentleman's house near Exeter for lunch and tea. It was half-past eleven when we started and we didn't get back till nigh on seven."

"What did you do then?"

"I had my supper up at the house, like I always do, and then came down to the Frigate for a pint. It was getting on for eight o'clock then, I recollect."

"And you stayed at the Frigate for an hour or so?"

"Must have done. Anyway, it was getting dark when I turned out, and it was raining fit to drown a dog."

"Where was the dinghy?" Merrion asked.

"Tied up at the Yacht Club steps. Mr. Grimstead always leaves her there when he's been out. I pushed straight off and rowed across the bay to *Ianthe*."

"What did you do then?"

"Why, I slipped down below and waited there until the squall was over. It was no good messing about on deck in that."

"What time did you come up again?"

"It must have been well after nine o'clock. More like twenty-past, most likely. Then I got the riding light burning, hoisted it, and turned in."

"You're quite sure that you stayed below from the time you reached *Ianthe* until the time you hoisted the riding light?"

"I'm certain of that. There was no sense in being on deck in that rain, was there?"

"What were you doing while you were down below?"

"Nothing very particular. Just tidying round in the engine-room and fo'c'sle."

"Did you see or hear anything unusual during that time?"

"Can't say that I did. There wasn't anything to see unless I'd looked out of a port-hole. And as for hearing with the rain beating down on deck like that just above my head, I doubt if I'd have heard a clap of thunder."

Arnold looked slightly incredulous. “How far from the end of the jetty was *Ianthe* lying?” he asked.

“Only a matter of a few yards. We always take her as close in as we can, without her stern fouling the jetty when she swings.”

“At nine o’clock then, you were actually within twenty yards of the end of the jetty?”

“I dare say I was,” Rogers replied. “You can see her mast sticking out of the water now, and she was lying within a few feet of the same place then.”

Arnold’s tone became a trifle more severe. “You know that Captain Stanlake was shot on the end of the jetty about nine o’clock that evening?”

“So I heard when I came ashore next morning. But I saw or heard nothing of it, I’ll take my oath on that. And, for that matter, I don’t know that I’d have stretched out a finger to interfere if I had seen anything. Mister Captain Stanlake was no particular friend of mine, I can tell you.”

But Arnold persisted. “You’re absolutely certain that you didn’t hear the report of a shot or see a flash?”

“I’ll take my oath that I didn’t see or hear anything,” Rogers replied earnestly. “If you’d been on board with me that night, you wouldn’t have wondered at that. With the rain beating down on the deck like that you wouldn’t have heard a shot, or, if you’d heard it, you wouldn’t have noticed it. Then there was the canvas cover over the cockpit flapping like a machine-gun. And as for seeing a flash, why, there’s the light on the end of the jetty flashing all the time.”

Merrion nodded. “I think you can take his word for that,” he said. “Now, Rogers, you’ve told us that you waited until the squall passed over, then went on deck and hoisted the riding light. I dare say you glanced in the direction of the jetty when you had done so. Did you happen to notice anything unusual then?”

Rogers shook his head. “I can’t say that I did,” he replied. “But, then, you see, it was dead low water and, lying right under the jetty so to speak, I couldn’t see on to the top of it. But now you come to mention it, I did notice something rather queer, though I’ve never given it a thought from that moment to this.”

“What was that?”

“Well, I hoisted the riding light, had a look to see the chain was properly bitted, and then took a look round. And then something on the side of the

jetty caught my eye. Just a point of red light it was, as though someone had thrown away a cigarette end and it had caught in the stonework. But it wasn't a cigarette, and I'm blest if I know now what it can have been."

"How do you know that it wasn't a cigarette?"

"Because it moved. And it moved the wrong way, too. It was right down nearly to the water level when I first saw it. And, you may believe me or you may not, but it crawled up the side of the jetty until it got to the top and then, of course, I couldn't see it any longer. But it must have been a sea glow-worm, though I never heard tell of such a thing before."

"What did this red light look like?" Arnold asked.

"Just exactly like the end of a cigarette that's been thrown away while it's still alight. I made sure that's what it was, when I first saw it. But I never heard of a cigarette climbing up the side of a wall by itself."

"The obvious explanation is that it was probably in some one's mouth," Arnold exclaimed impatiently.

"That I'll swear it wasn't!" Rogers replied. "It wasn't so dark that I shouldn't have seen anyone who'd been there. I don't mean that I should have seen them to recognise them, but I'd have been bound to have seen something moving. And for another thing, no one could have climbed the jetty just there unless they'd a rope or something. It was the other side from where the iron ladder is."

"You're perfectly certain that you saw this moving spark or whatever it was?"

"I'm as certain of it as I am that I'm sitting here talking to you two gentlemen. It must have been something come out of the sea, though I'd never seen the like before. And when it had gone over the top, I went below again and turned in."

"You didn't see or hear anyone on the jetty after that?" Arnold asked.

Rogers shook his head. "I didn't come on deck again until after sunrise next morning," he replied.

"I dare say you've heard that the tide-gauge fixed to the beacon on the end of the jetty was out of order last Tuesday?" Merrion said.

"I noticed that there was something wrong with it when I went ashore about half-past seven for my breakfast. It was showing eleven feet over the bar, but there can't have been anything like that for it was getting on towards

low water. But it had seemed to be working all right on Monday evening when I went aboard."

"Did you tell any one that the tide-gauge wasn't working?"

"Not I. It was no concern of mine. I've never troubled my head much about the blessed thing. There's no need to look at it to tell you how much water there is. You can tell that for yourself by looking where the level is at the end of the jetty."

"Where were you between half-past seven and half-past eleven on Tuesday morning?" Arnold asked.

"Why, as soon as I came ashore I walked up to the house to get my breakfast."

"Hold on a minute," Arnold interrupted. "What house?"

"Why, Mr. Grimstead's, in Granville Terrace, of course. I've got a room there over the garage, and I get my meals in the servants' hall. And when I'd had my breakfast there was plenty for me to do, I can promise you that. I'd only just got the car polished over when it was time to start."

"I see. Now you said just now that you wouldn't have lifted a finger to stop Captain Stanlake being shot. How's that?"

"Well, that was only a manner of speaking, as you might say," Rogers replied. "I dare say if there'd been occasion, I should have done what I could. But there wasn't. I don't know anything about it, and that's that."

"All the same, you've told us yourself that you had a grudge against him."

"I'm not the only one in Brenthithe. And you'd have had a grudge against him if he'd treated you as he did me."

"How did you manage to get up against him?" Merrion asked.

"Well, sir, I'll tell you. I'm not denying that the fault may have been mine in the first place, but he'd no right to do what he did, for all that. It was about a couple of months ago it happened, some time in June, I recollect. Mr. Grimstead was going away and he told me one evening that I'd better take *Ianthe* up the harbour, where there's a set of proper moorings laid down for her.

"Well, what with one thing and another, I didn't get under way until I'd had my supper. And then as I was going up the harbour I caught sight of a chap I wanted to see standing just outside the Topsail Schooner. So I stopped

the engine, tied up alongside the ferry steps and jumped ashore to have a word with him.

"We hadn't been in the pub more than half an hour or so, when in came one of the harbour men, Nobby they call him. He's an ill-tempered sort of chap, and he came straight to me and asked me if I didn't know that the Harbour Master had made an order that no boats were to tie up within fifty yards of the steps either way. I told him I knew all about that, but I wasn't doing any harm and I should be shifting in a few minutes. That somehow didn't seem to satisfy Nobby, and he said that if I didn't shift at once he'd have to report me. I told him to go to hell, and he toddled off.

"But that wasn't the end of it, not by any manner of means. Back he comes after a few minutes and butts into the conversation I was having with my chum. This time he said that he was going off to see the Harbour Master straight away, and he told me that I should find myself in trouble before I was very much older.

"Well, that proper got my back up. It wasn't as if I was doing any harm. I'd been careful to tie *Ianthe* up so that she wouldn't be in old Neddy's way, and there was no real reason why she shouldn't lie where she was all night, for that matter. And maybe I'd had a drop or two more than usual. Anyway, I told Nobby that I'd go and see the Harbour Master for myself, and tell him to keep his men from worrying honest folk who weren't doing anybody any harm.

"I got old Neddy to put me across the harbour, and the first thing I did was to look into the office. The Captain wasn't there and the place was shut up. Come to think of it, there wasn't anything very extraordinary in that, for by this time it was well after nine o'clock.

"However, I knew well enough where he lived, and off I went up High Street to old Rumwell's shop. There was no one about, but the door wasn't locked so I pushed it open and went in. I thought I'd see Stanlake's chap, him that had been steward in the *Cluniac*, but he didn't seem to be about either. So I went on upstairs and then I heard voices in the room right in front of me. One of them was the Captain's right enough, you couldn't mistake that once you'd heard it. Well, I thought, here's my chance of giving this cocksure Harbour Master a piece of my mind. So I opened the door and walked into the room, and there he was sure enough."

Rogers paused and his face clouded over. Evidently the recollection of what followed was still painful.

"Was Captain Stanlake alone?" asked Arnold quietly.

"No, he wasn't. There was a lady there, too. She was sitting facing the door, and when she saw me come in she jumped up and screamed and ran out by a door at the other end of the room, and the Captain looked round to see what all the trouble was about."

"He can't have been altogether pleased to see you," Arnold remarked. "What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything," Rogers replied in an aggrieved tone. "He didn't so much as give me a chance of telling him what I'd come about. He just caught me by the shoulders with those great clumsy hands of his, and ran me downstairs through the shop. And when we got to the door he gave me a kick in the behind which sent me half across the pavement. And when I looked round he'd gone inside again and banged the door of the shop behind him."

"Did you make any attempt to resume the interview?" Merrion asked.

"Did I go back to see him, you mean? No, I didn't. For one thing he might have locked the door of the shop, for all I knew. And for another, he was twice my size, and I wasn't going to stand for being man-handled again. So I just mooched off and took *Ianthe* up to her moorings."

"Did you ever hear any more about it?"

Rogers shook his head. "I kept out of the Captain's way after that," he replied. "I don't know whether he told the governor about it, but if he did, he never said anything to me."

"Who was the lady you saw with Captain Stanlake?"

"That I couldn't say. She wasn't known to me by sight."

"Would you recognise her if you saw her again?"

"I doubt I should. You see, I only caught sight of her for a moment before she got up and ran out of the room."

"How long were you in the place, Rogers?" Arnold asked.

"Only long enough to go into the shop and up the stairs to the room where the Captain was. I wasn't there many seconds after that, I promise you."

"I see. Now I want you to think pretty carefully before you answer this question. Have you ever been back there since?"

"No, that I haven't," Rogers exclaimed. "I hadn't been welcomed so warmly that I wanted to call a second time, as you might say."

"You gave up the idea of giving Captain Stanlake a piece of your mind, then?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I thought I'd better keep my mouth shut in case the governor got to hear about it. Ah, there's that blessed barge just coming out of the harbour now! I'll run along, if you gentlemen will excuse me."

"It's all right," said Merrion as Rogers hurried off towards his dinghy. "He won't run away and you can easily find him again if you want him. Upon my word, though, that's a most interesting yarn that he's been telling us!"

"Yes, if he was telling the truth," Arnold replied doubtfully.

"I think he was telling the truth as far as in him lies. At all events you can check up his movements during Tuesday, and that's the most important thing."

"There's no means of checking his statement as to what he was doing at nine o'clock that evening," said Arnold significantly.

"No. You'll have to accept his word for that. I can see what's in your mind clearly enough. In some respects Rogers exactly fits the bill. With *Ianthe* lying where she was, he could have reached the jetty in his dinghy in a few seconds. He could have cut the wires of the tide-gauge on Monday night and shot Stanlake the following evening. But the same old difficulty presents itself with even greater force in his case."

"What difficulty do you mean?"

"How was he to know when Stanlake would choose to investigate the cause of the failure of the tide-gauge? Rogers's time wasn't his own. He couldn't stay on board *Ianthe* and wait until he saw Stanlake walking down the jetty. If his statement is true, and as I said just now you can easily check it, he wasn't anywhere near the jetty from half-past seven on Tuesday morning until nearly nine o'clock that evening. How could he possibly tell, when he went aboard *Ianthe*, that Stanlake hadn't already been to see what the trouble was?"

"That's all very well," said Arnold; "but as you say yourself, the man had the opportunity. By his own admission he also had the motive."

"I know," Merrion replied, "but somehow his way of telling the story didn't strike me as being that of a guilty man. If he had murdered Stanlake, he wouldn't have volunteered that account of his quarrel with him. I wonder who the lady was? Her presence may explain why Bickton was sent out to the pictures with such curious regularity."

Arnold frowned. "It's rather a delicate question," he said. "Whoever she was, you can't expect her to come forward with a description of her private interviews with Stanlake in his rooms. Nor do I think she's likely to have had anything to do with Stanlake's death. Whoever did that job it wasn't a woman, that's quite obvious."

"No, but once you get on the track of a woman in an affair like this, you never know where it's going to lead to. It's a pity Rogers didn't recognise her, but it can't be helped. She's almost as intriguing as his marine glow-worm. What did you make of that, by the way?"

Arnold made a gesture of impatience. "I'm very much inclined to think that Rogers imagines things when he's got a drink or two inside him," he replied. "That's why I'm not disposed to waste much time over what he told us. It's more than likely that he invented both the lady and the red spark to put us off the scent. It's my own private belief that he's the man we want."

"You remember what Whitford said about the back flash," Merrion suggested. "I didn't notice any sign of Rogers's face being scorched or his eyelashes burnt."

"Oh, to hell with that!" Arnold exclaimed impatiently. "Like all experts, Whitford's full of theories that you can't prove one way or the other. Besides, when Rogers shot Stanlake he may have been wearing a mask. It would be a very natural thing for him to do, when you come to think about it. And a mask would have protected him from the flash, wouldn't it? He's the man, I feel pretty confident."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" Merrion asked.

Arnold stood up abruptly. "I'm going to Mr. Grimstead's place first and to the Frigate afterwards," he replied. "I'll check up Rogers's statement and I'll have a look at that workshop of his. And perhaps I'll pick up a bit of gossip about the pistol. Someone may have seen it in his possession. Care to come with me?"

Merrion shook his head. "It doesn't sound interesting enough, thanks very much," he replied. "I'd rather stay here, if you don't mind. For one thing, I want to do a spot of thinking, and for another I want to watch the

salvage operations over yonder. But you'll find me lunching at the Central Restaurant some time between one and half-past, if you care to drop in."

CHAPTER XI

DISORDER AT A FUNERAL

MERRION, left alone, lighted a cigarette and stared intently across Bollard Bay towards the end of the jetty. He could plainly see the iron tripod surmounted by its lantern, and the dial of the tide-gauge with the pointer still indicating eleven feet, though it was now almost dead low water. It seemed to him that the pieces of the puzzle lay exposed before his eyes, inviting him to put them together.

By this time Merrion had formed certain conclusions of his own, based mainly on his native common sense. In the face of local opinion, it seemed ridiculous for him to believe that the motive for Stanlake's murder lay in a dislike of his personality or his notions. In normal times people don't get murdered because they have made themselves unpopular with a section of the community. The fantastic idea that Stanlake had been shot by some champion of the New Town did not appeal to Merrion. Brutus would be out of date among the progressive citizens of Brenthithe.

Murder nowadays was always inspired by more personal motive. That brought one to what constituted a satisfactory motive for murder. Criminal records showed that murder had often been committed for the most trivial reasons. But in this particular case all considerations of murder for gain could be set aside. No one in Brenthithe or elsewhere profited one iota by Stanlake's death. As to indirect gain, Merrion could only think of two possible beneficiaries. Neddy Knapp, who would now presumably be allowed to renew his lease of the ferry, and the at present unknown but eventual successor to Stanlake's job.

Eliminating murder for gain, direct or indirect, there remained murder for vengeance. And here the search for motive was like looking for a particular tree in a forest. It seemed impossible to find anyone who had come into contact with Stanlake without quarrelling with him. Except of course, people like Mr. Pottern, and even he had apparently a private reason for mistrust.

Merrion began to indulge in a mental catechism, something in this form:

When were the wires conveying the current to the tide-gauge cut?

Almost certainly about 10.45 p.m. on the 16th, when the depth of water over the bar was actually eleven feet. In support of this, Rogers states that the tide-gauge was working all right on Monday evening, but was registering incorrectly on Tuesday morning.

Why were the wires cut?

In order to lure Stanlake to the end of the jetty.

Who cut the wires?

Some person who possessed a pair of pliers and was either a swimmer or had access to a boat. It is very improbable that the end of the jetty was approached from the landward side, owing to the existence of the barrier and the locked gate.

Was the person who cut the wires the murderer of Stanlake?

Almost certainly. It is highly improbable that the wires were mischievously cut, merely to annoy the Harbour Master.

Was this person a native of Brenthithe, or a stranger?

A native undoubtedly, since it is very difficult to explain how a stranger could have known that the tide-gauge was the apple of Stanlake's eye, and that he would inevitably go in person to investigate the cause of its failure.

Are you satisfied that the pistol found by the diver was the one which at one time reposed on a shelf in Stanlake's boxroom?

Absolutely. The weapon is of so unusual a type that Bickton's identification of it can be accepted without question.

Was this pistol the weapon with which the fatal shot was fired?

Whitford's evidence on this point appears to be unassailable. Had the pistol been a mass-produced weapon I might have had my doubts. But according to Whitford it must be almost unique.

How did the murderer obtain possession of the pistol?

By purloining it from Stanlake's room. Conditions were such that this would have presented no great difficulty.

Who could have known where the pistol was to be found?

Anyone who had entered Stanlake's rooms and penetrated as far as the boxroom. We have at present a catalogue of eight visitors to Number 47 High Street.

Repeat the names of these visitors.

Captain Frimley of the *Fulmar* and his chief engineer Leyland. Captain Sneyd of the *Merganser* and his chief engineer, name at present unascertained. Mr. Holden, the secretary of the Yacht Club, Dr. Nately, the police surgeon. The names of these visitors have been supplied by Bickton. In addition we have Jack Rogers, by his own admission, and the somewhat nebulous lady whom he saw on the occasion of his visit.

Of these eight, can any be excluded from the list of suspects?

The first four can be struck out without hesitation, since neither the *Fulmar* nor the *Merganser* were in port when the crime was committed. The remaining four have no such satisfactory alibis. The circumstances of the crime, however, make it extremely improbable that it was committed by a woman.

Let us turn to the crime itself. Where and in what position was Stanlake standing when the bullet hit him?

He had unlocked the gate and hung up chain and padlock beside it. He must have employed both hands in this operation, and had therefore laid down his bag of tools as he performed it. But he had now picked it up again and begun to pull the gate open towards him. He must therefore have been standing just on the landward side of the gate facing the end of the jetty. This is confirmed by the position in which his bag and the pistol were found.

Was the shot fired on a point on a level with Stanlake's head or below it?

The direction taken by the bullet through the head suggests that it was fired from a point on the level.

What does this indicate?

That the murderer was hidden on the jetty itself, probably behind the dial of the tide-gauge. It was practically low water at the time the shot was fired. A bullet originating from a boat would therefore have penetrated the head in an upward direction.

How did the murderer reach the end of the jetty?

Either by swimming or in a boat. The barrier and locked gate precluded an approach by land.

Have you any preference for either of these methods of locomotion?

On thinking it over, I'm not wrapped up in the swimming theory. That heavy pistol would be a devilishly awkward thing to swim with. Besides, how was the ammunition to be kept dry? On the whole I think it more likely that the murderer arrived in a boat.

What was the point of departure of this boat?

Either the Old Town side of the harbour or one of the small craft lying in Bollard Bay.

Why did the murderer fling the pistol into the sea when he had done with it?

It may never have entered his mind that anyone would trouble to look for it. Murderers are notoriously careless about such details. Alternatively, the recoil and flash combined may have caused him to throw it from him.

What did the murderer do next?

He jumped into his boat and rowed back from whence he came, thoroughly satisfied with his evening's work.

Recite any clues which might be helpful in his identification.

He must have been present in Brenthithe both on Monday night and Tuesday evening. He had, I am convinced, a personal grudge against Stanlake, originating probably in the latter's quarrelsome nature. He was familiar with Stanlake's rooms, and aware of the contents of his boxroom. He was a capable mechanic with access to a workshop. He was accustomed to handling a boat. Finally, it is probable that at the present moment his face is scorched.

Can you think of anyone who complies with all these conditions?

Quite frankly, I can't.

As an alternative would you consider the likelihood of a conspiracy having been formed to murder Captain Stanlake, in which several were concerned? Can it be supposed, for instance, that Dr. Nately stole the pistol, that Jack Rogers prepared the ammunition, and that Mr. Holden fired the shot?

I simply hate to think of such a thing. A murder of this kind is almost invariably a one-man job. As long as a theory of a single murderer working without accomplices remains tenable, I shall reject the idea of a conspiracy.

And yet you have, in front of your eyes at this moment, manifest evidence of a conspiracy.

Yes, I know, but that's altogether different. A few disgruntled folk will conspire together to perform an act of mischief. But they'd stick at a conspiracy for murder, if only for the reason that each would be afraid that one of the others would give him away.

Do you accept Rogers's statements at their face value?

I believe that he tells the truth as he sees it. I don't know that his account of his actions on Tuesday evening about nine o'clock can be accepted in all its details. But I do believe in the lady whom he discovered in Stanlake's rooms.

Rogers may have invented the lady in order to defame Stanlake's character?

Then why didn't he spread the story while Stanlake was alive? There's no particular point in defaming a man's character after he's dead.

Do you think that the existence of this lady has any bearing on the crime?

I'd like to reserve judgment on that point until I have some clue to her identity.

Having accepted the lady are you equally prepared to accept the marine glow-worm?

No, I'm not, for I never heard of such a creature. I'm well aware that, under certain conditions, marine creatures acquire a degree of phosphorescence. Rogers might have seen a phosphorescent crab climbing up the jetty, but such phosphorescence is almost invariably greenish, certainly not red as he described it. We must remember, however, that Rogers's powers of perception were no doubt impaired by his potations at the Frigate. What appeared to him to have been near at hand may, in fact, have been relatively distant. I'm prepared to believe that to one in his condition the red light of a car travelling northwards from the Topsail Schooner would have produced the impression he described.

Does the state of your appetite indicate lunch, preceded by an aperitif?

It does indeed. And if I'm to keep my appointment with Arnold, it's time that I was getting on.

Merrion rose from his seat and began to walk along the Parade towards the Central Restaurant. The wind had by now entirely dropped, and a bright sun shone upon the gentle swell rolling into Bollard Bay. But of the gay flotilla which had filled the anchorage on the previous day only half a dozen undamaged craft still rolled at their moorings. The drifting lighter had done its work only too well.

The tide, as Merrion noticed, was at its lowest, and salvage work had already begun upon *Ianthe*. The men on the barge were getting slings underneath her damaged hull, by the aid of which they would, when the tide rose, take her up the harbour, where she could be beached and repaired. The lighter, the cause of all the mischief, lay high and dry near the head of the bay. She was now surrounded by a crowd of spectators, who gazed sheepishly at the ominous name inscribed upon her side. Her victims lay scattered on the beach beyond her, displaying their shattered planks and broken spars. Already a conspicuous notice had appeared on the terrace of the Yacht Club to the effect that the regatta fixed for the following day had been cancelled. Even in his death Captain Stanlake had triumphed over the yachting fraternity.

On his way Merrion dropped in at the Lord Rodney, where he was accosted by Ogston. "The chaps say that the regatta has been officially cancelled, sir," the latter remarked.

"I saw a notice to that effect outside the Yacht Club," Merrion replied. "I don't see what else could have been done under the circumstances."

Ogston shook his head forebodingly. "It's a bad business," he said. "You mark my words, sir, there'll be a lot of trouble over this."

"What sort of trouble do you mean?" Merrion asked.

"Bad blood between the Old Town and the New, sir. So long as I can remember, there's been what you might call a jealousy between them. But I've never known it come to a head like this before. Everyone knows that it was those rascally fishermen who let that lighter adrift last night, and that they did it of a purpose. And the chaps on this side aren't likely to let them get away with it scot-free."

"The cancellation of the regatta will mean a considerable loss to the New Town, I suppose?"

"It will that, sir. Every year a lot of folk come for the regatta and stay over the week-end. Most of them bring a good bit of money in their pockets and they manage to spend it, too. But if there's no regatta, they'll go

somewhere else instead. Why, take my own case. I always reckon to take thirty or forty pounds extra in my bar on regatta day, but if I take five this year I'll be thankful. It does make one feel bitter, and there's no good in pretending it doesn't."

Merrion continued his way to the Central Restaurant. He had barely chosen his table and ordered lunch before Arnold joined him. "Hallo, any luck?" he asked.

"Not to speak of," Arnold replied wearily. "By the way, do you happen to know where the cemetery is?"

"At the back of the New Town, about half a mile or so from here," Merrion replied. "Are you thinking of buying a site for eventual occupation?"

"No, Stanlake's to be buried there this afternoon, and I wondered where it was, that's all. But you'll want to hear about the inquiries I've just been making, I suppose?"

Merrion nodded. "I'm all attention," he said.

"Well, I went first to the Frigate, and made the acquaintance of the landlord, Mr. Yewdale. He's a very good fellow, like most publicans, and quite ready to talk. He told me that he knew Jack Rogers well, as he's one of his most regular customers. He remembers Rogers being there on Tuesday evening, because he had some little difficulty in getting rid of him.

"Rogers came in soon after eight o'clock, apparently not in the best of tempers. He complained that he had been out all day driving Mr. Grimstead's car and hadn't had the chance of getting a drink. He said that he was pretty well fed up with his job, and that if he could find another one to suit him he wouldn't stay where he was any longer than he could help. And he ordered a pint of bitter with a double gin in it."

"A pretty pernicious drink," Merrion remarked. "He didn't mention Stanlake's name, I suppose?"

"Not in Yewdale's hearing. His particular grievance that evening seemed to be against his employer. Yewdale didn't pay much attention to him, for he'd heard him carry on like that before, and nothing had ever come of it. Rogers drank up his pint and had another with the same lacing. Yewdale told me that he began to feel a bit anxious, for he knew Rogers to be the sort of chap who's apt to get quarrelsome in his cups. About half-past eight he suggested to Rogers that it was time he went aboard *Ianthe*. But at that time it was the height of the rain-squall that we've heard so much about, and

Rogers told him that he'd be damned if he'd make a move until it had stopped raining.

"To cut a long story short, Rogers had a third drink and began to show signs of becoming troublesome. When he ordered a fourth, Yewdale refused to serve him and told him to clear out. I may say that Yewdale is a big powerful chap, who could have flung Rogers through the door with one hand. In the end Rogers left the pub just as the hands of the bar clock pointed to nine."

"Then he couldn't possibly have reached *Ianthe* before Stanlake was shot," said Merrion quietly.

"It doesn't look like it, even though Yewdale told me that his bar clock is usually five minutes fast. I asked him if Rogers was carrying anything when he came in and he told me that he wasn't. And a man couldn't very well hide a great pistol like that in his pocket."

"On the whole Yewdale's evidence is in Rogers's favour. Did you pick up any other scraps of gossip at the Frigate?"

"Well, yes, I did. I let Yewdale talk, and naturally the conversation turned to the subject of Stanlake. Yewdale knew him, and I asked him for his opinion of him. He told me that he had always managed to get on well enough with him. And he went on to say that however unpopular Stanlake may have been with men, he seemed to manage to hit it off with the ladies."

Merrion looked up quickly. "You persuaded him to enlarge on that subject, I hope," he said.

"He didn't want much persuasion. There were no other customers in the pub, and he seemed glad of someone to talk to. He told me that he'd only been at the Frigate since May 3rd last. Before that he was landlord of the King's Head which is in the Old Town, just where High Street comes out into the Fishmarket. He told me that it was a very nice house, and that in some ways he was very sorry to leave it."

"Did he tell you why he left it?"

"At considerable length. To put it shortly, he found that trade in the Old Town was decreasing year by year, whereas he knew that it was increasing on this side of the harbour. So, when he heard that the landlord of the Frigate was going to retire, he applied to the brewers and they let him transfer.

"It was when he was at the King's Head that he knew Stanlake. It seems that there's a very cosy little lounge there, which has always been used by a

select few. The officers of any ships that may happen to be lying at the wharf always go there. He mentioned lots of names that we've already heard. Captain Frimley of the *Fulmar* and Captain Sneyd of the *Merganser*, for instance. It's the sort of place they don't mind taking their wives into. And, soon after he was appointed here, Stanlake discovered the place. He'd usually drop in two or three times a week, Yewdale said. He was good-tempered enough on those occasions, perhaps because he felt he was off duty. He wouldn't mind standing any one a drink, but he never took anything alcoholic himself. His regular order was ginger ale."

"Not very exhilarating, perhaps, but I think I prefer it to Rogers's choice," said Merrion. "Do I gather that Stanlake made himself particularly pleasant to the lady customers in the lounge?"

"He didn't avoid them, anyhow. Yewdale remembers his talking to Captain Frimley and his wife and another lady who was with them."

"Well, after all, he couldn't very well walk out of the lounge as soon as a lady came in," said Merrion. "I don't see very much justification for Yewdale's remarks."

"Ah, but wait a minute. This is only leading up to the story. We come now to April 30th last, a date which Yewdale remembers because it was only three days before he left the King's Head. He had found things more than usually quiet that evening, for neither the *Fulmar* nor the *Merganser* were in port, and there seemed to be practically no one about. So he thought he'd take the opportunity of running over to the Frigate to fix up some details of the transfer on the following Monday.

"He left the King's Head soon after nine o'clock, got Neddy to put him across the harbour, and took a bus to the Frigate. He stayed there discussing matters with the retiring landlord until well after closing time. By the time he got to the ferry steps on his way back Neddy was nowhere to be seen. However, he just managed to catch the last chain ferry, which leaves the New Town side at a quarter-past eleven.

"He got back to the King's Head, where his wife had been in charge during his absence, and started tidying up the bar. While he was doing this he happened to look out of the window and saw two people—a man and a woman—walking down High Street towards the fish market. He didn't take any particular notice of them, but it struck him that if they wanted to get across the harbour they'd be unlucky. Neddy, as he knew, had gone to bed, and it was after half-past eleven when the last chain ferry left the Old Town side.

"He didn't give the matter any further thought until a few minutes later, when he heard the sound of a motor-boat engine being started by the fish market steps. That made him wonder, for the only motor-boat lying anywhere near there was the Harbour Master's launch. His curiosity got the better of him, and he crept out of the pub on to the wharf. And there, sure enough, was the launch crossing the harbour, with a man whom he recognised by his bulk as Stanlake steering and a woman sitting beside him. The launch reached the other side of the harbour, they both stepped ashore, and a few minutes later Stanlake came back alone. Yewdale was careful not to show himself, but he is perfectly certain that it was Stanlake whom he saw."

"The mysterious lady again!" Merrion exclaimed. "Yewdale didn't recognise her, by any chance?"

"Unfortunately not. It must have been pretty dark, you know, and Yewdale says that she was carefully muffled up. But I'm beginning to think that Rogers isn't such a liar as I was inclined to believe."

"It doesn't necessarily follow that it was the same lady. But it's very intriguing, all the same, although it has no very obvious connection with Stanlake's death. What report of Rogers did you get at Grimstead's place?"

"I saw the butler there and had a long talk to him. The butler is an old family servant, and I could tell at once that he didn't approve of Rogers. But for all that his statement was entirely in Rogers's favour. The butler confirmed the account of his movements last Tuesday in every respect.

"I took the opportunity of looking over the workshop, the garage, and Rogers's rooms. The workshop is equipped with a lathe and several other tools, and I imagine that its equipment is capable of turning out the bullet and the cartridge. But I couldn't hear of Rogers spending any time there this summer. His days seem to have been pretty fully occupied and his nights were spent on board *Ianthe*. I couldn't see anything wrong with the garage, except that it wasn't as tidy as it might have been, and I found nothing in any way incriminating in Rogers's rooms."

"I think, if I were you, I'd drop Rogers, at all events for the present," said Merrion thoughtfully. "I said just now that the mysterious lady or ladies had no very obvious connection with Stanlake's death; but after all, it was only by accident, as it were, that Rogers put us on the track of her or them. It's just possible that, if we could talk to her or them, we might, equally by accident, get on the track of something or someone else. That sounds terribly vague, but you know what I mean?"

"Yes, I know what you mean all right, but how are we going to get in touch with them? They are not likely to come forward of their own accord, and neither Rogers nor Yewdale can identify either of them."

Merrion smiled. "But there s another person who must have seen and recognised at least one of them," he said.

"Who's that?" Arnold asked.

"Bickton. Where was he when Stanlake and the fair unknown crossed the harbour on the night of April 30th?"

"Why, out on the spree, of course. He implied that he usually didn't get back till nearly midnight."

"I shouldn't have thought that the Old Town was a very inspiring place for a spree at that time of night."

"Who's talking about the Old Town? Bickton himself told us that he always went across to the New Town, where he amused himself by walking up and down the Parade or going to the pictures."

Merrion shook his head. "All the same, Bickton must have left the New Town very soon after eleven o'clock on the night of April 30th," he said. "Yewdale's statement is proof of that. He couldn't rouse the ferryman from his slumbers, and he only just caught the last chain ferry from the New Town side, which left at a quarter-past eleven. And if Bickton had missed that, he would have had to walk all the way round by Brent Royal and he wouldn't have been home until dawn. On the other hand, if he did catch it and went straight home to 47 High Street, he must have met Stanlake and the lady. Now what about it?"

"I never thought of that," Arnold replied. "We'll go and see Bickton directly we've finished lunch, and see if we can get anything out of him."

Having finished their meal Arnold and Merrion walked to the Parade, where they caught a bus which would take them to the ferry steps. The route taken by the bus was along the Parade to the Head of Bollard Bay, where it entered a long straight street running through the poorer quarters of the New Town. This street seemed to be unduly crowded with people standing about as though expecting something to happen. And as the bus threaded its way eastwards towards the harbour, Merrion became aware of a procession advancing from that direction to meet it.

"Hallo!" he said; "here comes a funeral. That's what all these people are waiting for, I suppose."

"It'll be Stanlake's, no doubt," Arnold replied. "He was to be buried at the cemetery at three o'clock and it's half-past two now."

"Well, let's jump out and see it pass," said Merrion. "We owe that to the man's memory at least." And before Arnold had time to object he had jumped off the bus and found a point of vantage on the pavement.

Arnold joined him, and the two watched the approaching procession. It was headed by the hearse, drawn by two black horses and proceeding at a walking pace. Following this were thirty or forty men on foot, dressed in jerseys and long boots and marching in straggling formation. Behind these again were three saloon cars. In the foremost of these Arnold recognised Mr. Pottern, and he guessed that his companions were his fellow members of the Harbour Commission.

"By jove, look at that!" Merrion exclaimed softly. "Whatever people may say, the fishermen at least are faithful to Stanlake's memory. The Harbour Commissioners couldn't decently absent themselves, I suppose, but you'll notice that nobody else has troubled to pay the last honours to the dead. For, somehow, I don't think this crowd on the pavement is here out of respect."

Merrion's surmise was very soon justified. As the procession advanced up the street an angry growl became clearly audible. The murmur seemed to be directed not so much against the body in the hearse as against its escort. Voices began to make themselves heard.

"Here comes those adjectived Old Towners! Blasted nerve of those fishermen to show their faces here after what happened last night."

And then suddenly a raucous and slightly inebriated voice began intoning: "Mackerel, mackerel, who wants to buy my stinking mackerel?"

At this insult three or four of the fishermen broke their ranks and made in the direction from which the voice preceded. In return the crowd surged forward into the roadway, blocking the progress of the hearse. The murmuring rose to an angry clamour.

"They're the blighters who spoilt the regatta! Who sent that blasted lighter into the bay? Come on, boys! If the police can't catch them we will!"

It was impossible to tell how the battle began. On the opposite side of the street to where Arnold and Merrion were standing was a grocer's shop, in front of which stood a box of eggs. Somebody snatched an egg from the box and flung it in the direction of the procession, probably with the group of fishermen as his target. The missile miscarried, however, and burst with a

sharp crack against the glass side of the hearse, which it covered with an unseemly splotch. And then in an instant the two groups of combatants had closed in an indiscriminate mêlée.

Arnold stepped forward, as though in a vain attempt to restore order, but Merrion caught him by the arm. "You can't do any good single-handed," he said. "The local police will turn up in a minute or two, I've no doubt. Meanwhile the best thing we can do is to try and clear a way for the hearse to get out of the crowd. The horses are looking a bit restive already, and if they begin to give trouble, somebody will get hurt."

Arnold accepted this most sensible advice and the two of them, one at the head of each of the horses, did their best to clear a way through the surging crowds. Very gradually, they succeeded in coaxing the hearse farther along the street, leaving the turmoil behind them.

Meanwhile a regular battle was in progress, in which the fishermen at first seemed to gain an advantage. It was in their favour that they were a compact body and operating upon interior lines. On the other hand, their opponents scattered along the pavement had access to an apparently inexhaustible supply of eggs and other missiles. Frantic shopkeepers tried to drag their goods inside their shops, but they were snatched away from under their hands. Eggs, fruit and vegetables of every description poured upon the devoted fishermen, who, weaponless, were powerless to retaliate.

However, the tactics they adopted were the best possible under the circumstances. They made successive rushes, now in one direction and now in another, brandishing their fists and knocking down anyone who ventured to withstand them. By this method they cleared one side of the street, where there happened to be a tobacconist's shop with a lot of walking-sticks displayed in the windows. In an instant the windows were broken, the sticks looted and distributed among the fishermen. Thus armed, they formed a solid phalanx and proceeded to drive their opponents up the street in the wake of the departing hearse.

This manœuvre had the result of easing the pressure round the three cars, which had already suffered severely. They had been compelled to come to a halt, and had afforded an excellent target for indiscriminate missiles. Not one of their windows was unscarred and their immaculate paintwork was hidden under a coating of broken eggs. It was unlikely that the New Town folk had a personal grudge against any of the Harbour Commissioners, but they were identified with Stanlake, with the fishermen, with the miscreants

who had wrecked the expected harvest of the regatta. So, caught in the turmoil, they became unwilling objects of the popular fury.

Mr. Pottern and his companions soon showed that they had no stomach for fight. So soon as they had room to move, their chauffeurs swerved in turn into a convenient side street, and the bespattered cars were no more seen.

It was at this stage that the local police appeared upon the scene, in the persons of a sergeant and four constables. They could not be expected to understand the origin of the fray, and, arriving thus suddenly, it must have seemed to them that the infuriated fishermen had fallen like wolves upon a crowd of defenceless citizens. They advanced, slowly and with the dignity that only policemen seem to acquire, towards the former, the sergeant leading them.

A group of Englishmen, however bellicose in intention, always pauses, at least for a moment, in the presence of a policeman's tunic. The fishermen were no exception to this rule. They halted, and each man among them began to recount his version of the affair in no measured terms. The sergeant, having achieved his immediate aim, was content to listen.

But he reckoned without the New Town folk. The crowd profited by this brief respite to rally. By this time most of its members had armed themselves with a weapon of sorts. Covered by a barrage of eggs and vegetables, it resumed the offensive and swept roaring down the street. The sergeant and his men were carried away by the first wave. The next moment, the assault burst upon the thin blue line of fishermen who, fighting and cursing lustily, were borne slowly backwards.

From this moment the fishermen never recovered their ascendancy. Although they attempted a valiant resistance, they were swept with ever increasing velocity the whole length of the street. The policemen, unable to extricate themselves, were carried along by the current. At last the surging, shouting mass reached the chain ferry hard, where by a fortunate chance the ferry was waiting. The fishermen, overpowered but still refusing to acknowledge defeat, took refuge upon it.

A triumphant howl rose from the New Towners, and the sergeant snatched at this critical moment to re-assert his authority. He and his men managed to check an ugly rush on to the ferry in pursuit of the fishermen, and the ferryman, grasping the situation, let full steam into his rackety engine and drew out across the harbour. The hostile forces being thus

separated, the crowd of New Towners dispersed with suspicious rapidity, singing songs of triumph.

Meanwhile the hearse, escorted by Arnold and Merrion, had pursued its way unmolested. The whole force of the New Towners had been concentrated on the battlefield, and no reserves appeared to dispute the passage of Captain Stanlake's body. The cemetery was reached without incident, and the body was decently interred in the presence of a few disinterested spectators who had drifted to the spot out of mere curiosity.

CHAPTER XII

A LADY IN THE CASE

A COUPLE of hours later, Arnold was closeted with Major Metfield at the police station in the Old Town. In the mind of the Chief Constable the events of the last twenty-four hours had completely eclipsed such a trifle as a mere murder. His perturbation was apparent, not only in his words but in the way he strode up and down the room gesticulating wildly.

"Such a thing has never happened before, never in the whole course of my experience!" he exclaimed. "First of all that scandalous affair of the lighter and, only a few hours later, this attempt by the fishermen to terrorise the New Town. You may take it from me, Inspector, that I shall not hesitate to adopt the sternest measures to restore order."

"This afternoon's disturbance did not originate with the fishermen, sir," Arnold ventured.

"What's that?" Major Metfield exclaimed. "Not originate with the fishermen? Why, my sergeant saw them armed with sticks driving a lot of unarmed and defenceless citizens along Bay Street."

"Well, sir, I happened to be there when the disturbance started," Arnold replied. "Perhaps you'd like to hear my statement of events."

The Chief Constable listened rather ungraciously while Arnold described the scene he had witnessed. "That's all very well," he said. "You say that the crowd shouted insults to the fishermen escorting the hearse. Well, in my opinion they were thoroughly justified. I don't suppose you realise the incalculable loss which the enforced cancellation of the regatta means to the town. And I suppose you're not going to suggest that that cancellation was not entirely due to the scandalous action of the fishermen?"

"I don't know anything about that, sir. I only wish to express my opinion that the crowds in Bay Street this afternoon were out for mischief."

"There'd have been no mischief done if the fishermen hadn't attended the funeral," Major Metfield grumbled. "And now look what's happened.

Half a dozen admissions to hospital, all suffering from bruises and contusions, five of my men's uniforms utterly ruined and two of their helmets missing. To say nothing of several tradesmen's windows in Bay Street being broken and their goods looted. And on top of it all I've just had an official message from Mr. Pottern as Chairman of the Harbour Commissioners. He tells me that the members of the commission have been grossly insulted, and their cars seriously damaged. Not unnaturally he wished to know what steps I propose to take in the matter."

"It was a most unfortunate exhibition of ill-feeling, sir," said Arnold, seeing that some comment was expected from him.

"Unfortunate! It will be most unfortunate for those responsible, I promise you. I shall apply for summonses against all the fishermen recognised by the police, I think I can trust the bench not to take an unduly lenient view of the matter. These hooligans deserve a severe lesson, and I shall do my best to see that they get it. Thank you, Inspector. That's all I have to say to you for the present."

Arnold, thus dismissed, returned to the Lord Rodney where he found Merrion awaiting him.

"Well," asked the latter, "how's your friend the Chief Constable? Is he asking for a body of troops to be quartered in Brenthithe in order to restore order?"

"He didn't tell me so," Arnold replied, "but he's distinctly upset, and I don't altogether blame him. But he won't take my word for it that it wasn't the fishermen who started the fuss this afternoon."

Merrion shrugged his shoulders. "That's his affair entirely," he said. "If I were in his place I shouldn't worry overmuch about what has already happened. I should take precautions against what's pretty certain to happen in the future."

"What do you mean?" Arnold asked.

"I mean that peace isn't by any means declared between the rival factions. Everybody must admit that there's a very bitter feeling between the Old and the New Town. I expect that feeling has been smouldering for years, but we needn't go into the history of it. The point that concerns us is that Stanlake's death has fanned it to a blaze. The Harbour Master seems to have been a focus of dissension while he lived, and his death hasn't improved matters."

"You may as well hold Stanlake responsible for to-day's events," Arnold objected.

"I don't. I hold his murderer responsible. Just consider the sequence of events. Stanlake is murdered under circumstances which point very strongly to murder. It is a matter of common knowledge that while his schemes were popular with the fishermen they were anathema to the Yacht Club. The fishermen not unnaturally conclude that the members of the Yacht Club, individually or collectively, were responsible for Stanlake's death. Hence their action of last night, which must be regarded as an act of vengeance.

"It was not only the Yacht Club that suffered by this act but the whole of the New Town, directly or indirectly. The cancellation of the regatta seems a trifle to us, but it's a pretty serious matter for some folk here. In any case, the fishermen's action is bound to be regarded as a direct attack by the Old Town upon the New. I haven't a doubt that since early this morning the more impetuous spirits of the New Town were looking round for some way of getting their own back.

"They saw their chance when they heard that a body of fishermen was going to act as escort at the funeral. It's no use telling me that all those people we saw in Bay Street this afternoon were there by accident. You may have noticed that they were nearly all young men, and that there were very few women among them. They were out to provoke a disturbance which would end in the fishermen being beaten up. And from all I've heard a very pretty fight took place behind our backs. Did the Chief Constable say anything to you about the casualty list?"

"It isn't very formidable, I gather. It's wonderful how few people get seriously hurt in scuffles of this kind."

"The tougher the participants, the less likely they are to suffer damage. But you see what's happened. Open war has been proclaimed between the New Town and the fishermen, who no doubt have the sympathy of the Old Town behind them. The fishermen undoubtedly won the first engagement, and though I gather that they were defeated in the second, they managed to retire across the harbour in fairly good order. But you may take it that the warlike ardour of the opposing forces is by no means appeased. Unless the Chief Constable takes the necessary precautions, there'll be another break of hostilities at any moment."

"What precautions do you expect him to take?" Arnold asked.

"The simple one of confining the rival armies in their respective camps. It could be done easily enough by suspending the working of the ferries."

"But that couldn't go on indefinitely," Arnold objected.

"It wouldn't be necessary to continue it indefinitely. One event and one alone would restore peace immediately."

"What's that?"

"The arrest of the person responsible for Stanlake's death. The whole root of the trouble is that the Old Town believes that the guilt lies with the New Town, and the New Town not unnaturally resents the suggestion. Discover the criminal and, in the sensation that his arrest will cause, the feud will be forgotten. In other words, my friend, it's up to you to restore the blessings of peace to this distracted city."

"I wish to heaven that I could discover the criminal," Arnold exclaimed. "And this disturbance isn't likely to help matters, as far as I can see."

"If you'll take my advice you'll leave the disturbance to the local police and get on with your own job. You may remember that we were on our way to interview Bickton when we got involved in that unseemly riot. It's only just after seven o'clock now. Supposing we make another attempt?"

"All right. By the way, talking of Bickton, I didn't see him at the funeral, did you?"

"No, I didn't. And yet you'd have expected him to pay his last respects to his master's body. Come along, and we'll see what he's got to say for himself."

This time they met with no obstacles. Bay Street, however, presented a sorry spectacle, several of its windows broken and the roadway and pavements littered with crushed fruit and vegetables. A couple of policemen patrolled it from end to end, moving on the groups which showed a tendency to collect at the corners. An uncanny sort of quietness brooded over the scene, in spite of the fact that it was Friday evening, usually a busy period in Brenthithe.

Arnold and Merrion crossed by the old ferry and walked up High Street to Number 47. They found the shop door unlocked as usual, and walked in. As they mounted the stairs, a powerful smell of onions greeted them, and when they reached the landing Bickton appeared, a smoking frying-pan in his hand.

"Hallo," Arnold exclaimed, "what are you doing?"

"Just frying a bit of steak for my supper, sir," Bickton replied apologetically.

"Well, you'll have to put it aside for a few minutes. Come in here, and for heaven's sake shut the door behind you to keep that stench out. Were you at Captain Stanlake's funeral this afternoon, Bickton?"

"No, sir, I wasn't. But I heard what happened. I don't know what the Captain would have said if he'd known."

"Just as well that he didn't know, perhaps. But how was it that you didn't attend?"

Bickton shook his head. "I couldn't possibly manage it, sir; though, of course, I should like to have gone. The Captain wouldn't have cared for me to leave the place empty, and I don't know anyone that I could trust to look after it while I was away."

"Perhaps you're right," said Arnold, "but that isn't what we came to talk to you about. I want you to set your memory to work. Do you remember the evening of April 30th last?"

Bickton considered this for a moment or two in silence. "I can't say that I remember it particularly, sir," he replied.

"Well, we'll try to help you. You told us that when Captain Stanlake gave you an evening off you always went across to the New Town. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir. If it was a fine night I'd just stroll about and perhaps drop in to a pub for a drink. If it wasn't I'd go into one of the picture houses."

"What time used you to get back here?"

"The Captain always used to say that he didn't want to see me before half-past eleven or twelve. So in case the ferryman had turned in, I always used to make a point of catching the last chain ferry, which leaves the New Town side at a quarter-past eleven."

"Were you ever unlucky enough to miss it?"

"No, sir. I was always very careful to be there in plenty of time."

"I see. Did you always find Captain Stanlake at home when you got back here?"

"Oh, yes, sir, he was always in, but he hadn't gone to bed, and I used to make his cocoa for him."

Arnold nodded. "He was always in, you say. Now, Bickton, I want you to be very careful. Do you know the King's Head at the bottom of High

Street?"

"Yes, sir, I know it. When I had my evenings out I used to call in there sometimes if I had to wait for the ferry."

"Did you know Mr. Yewdale who used to keep it, and has now gone to the Frigate in the New Town?"

"Yes, sir, he always used to speak to me when I went into the bar."

"Very well. On April 30th, he had been to the New Town and came back by the last ferry. Does that help your memory at all?"

"Yes, sir. I remember that one day about that time I did meet Mr. Yewdale on the ferry and had a word with him."

"Right. We've got the date established at last, then. Do you remember what happened after you spoke to Mr. Yewdale that evening?"

"I walked straight back here as usual, sir."

"Did you?" said Arnold quietly. "Then you must have met the lady who had been spending the evening here. Who was she, Bickton?"

Bickton looked so aghast as this unexpected question that Merrion could not resist a smile. "The lady, sir?" he stammered. "I'm sure I don't know what lady you're speaking of."

"Oh, yes, you do," Arnold replied. "You won't do yourself any good by trying to prevaricate. We know that Captain Stanlake crossed the harbour in his own launch with a lady soon after half-past eleven that night. If you came straight home from the ferry, as you've told us you did, you must have met the two of them either here or in High Street. Which was it?"

Bickton looked supremely uncomfortable. He hesitated for a long time, and when at last he spoke it was in a voice hardly above a whisper. "They were coming downstairs when I opened the door of the shop."

"Did they see you?"

"They couldn't very well help it, sir. The Captain was carrying a torch, and he turned it full on to me."

"Could you see them?"

"Only in a manner of speaking, sir."

"Did you recognise this lady?"

"No, sir, I didn't. It was too dark in the shop for that. And when the Captain flashed his lamp in my face I couldn't see any more."

"What happened next?"

"The Captain told me to go upstairs and wait until he came back, sir. And when he did come back he told me that I was to forget everything that I'd seen and heard that evening. And he told me that if I didn't, he'd tear me in little pieces and throw the bits into the harbour. But, of course, that was only his manner of speaking, sir."

"That's all very well, Bickton. But you ought to have told us about this lady when we questioned you before. Why didn't you?"

"Well, sir, the Captain wouldn't have wished it, and I didn't see that it would have done him any good to have it spoken about now. And you may be sure that it wasn't the lady who shot the Captain, sir."

"How do you know that?"

"Because she seemed too fond of him, if you know what I mean, sir. I heard something of their conversation as they were coming downstairs."

"Well, now that you've admitted the existence of the lady, you may as well tell us the whole truth. Had you ever seen her before or did you ever see her again? Here, in these rooms, I mean?"

"No, sir, that was the first time I saw her. And after that I was very careful when I'd been out not to get back here before midnight. When I came off the ferry, I used to walk round the back of the Old Town so as not to get here too soon."

"Would it surprise you to learn that the lady did come here again upon at least one occasion?"

"Not altogether, sir. I've sometimes thought that she might have been here again by the way things were left."

"Were you astonished to find that Captain Stanlake was on apparently intimate terms with a lady?"

"Well, sir, to tell the truth I wasn't very much astonished. I'd been shipmates with him and I knew that he was fond of ladies' company when he went ashore."

"I see. Now about this particular lady. Would you recognise her again if you saw her?"

"Not if I saw her, sir. But I might if I heard her speak. She had a queer voice, sort of husky-like, which I think I should know again if I heard it."

"You can't guess who she might have been?"

"No, I can't, sir. Some lady that the Captain had met since he had been down here, I suppose. But where he met her, I can't tell, for he never went out into company much."

"Do you know that he was in the habit of going to the King's Head?"

"Yes, sir, I know that, because Mr. Yewdale told me. But, of course, he'd go into the lounge, while I used the public bar."

"Do you think he can have met this lady there?"

"He might have done, sir, for I know that ladies do go into the lounge of the King's Head."

At this point Merrion entered into the conversation. "When we were here before you told us that the captain and the chief engineer of both the *Fulmar* and the *Merganser* had been here. That is quite true, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir," Bickton replied with an air of offended dignity. "I shouldn't think of telling an untruth to you gentlemen."

"You may have told us the truth, but you didn't tell us the whole truth, you know, Bickton. Now when these ships' officers came here, did they bring any of their womenfolk with them?"

"No, sir, I'm perfectly sure that they didn't—at least to the best of my knowledge."

"Did Captain Stanlake show any of them the curiosities which he kept in the boxroom?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'm perfectly certain that he didn't do that."

"How can you be certain, Bickton? One or other of them may have come here while you were out, and Captain Stanlake may have taken them into the boxroom and shown them his collection."

Bickton shook his head. "The Captain would never have done that, sir. You see, until he'd finished the tide-gauge, he used to keep parts of it in there, and he wouldn't let anyone look at them, not even me. I know that he was particularly anxious that nobody who understood about such things should be allowed to see them. And by the time the tide-gauge was finished the officers from the ships weren't coming any more."

"Why weren't they coming any more? Had Captain Stanlake quarrelled with them?"

"I don't know that he'd actually quarrelled with them, sir, but, as I think I told you, the captain didn't encourage their coming here and they sort of dropped off."

"All the same, someone must have taken that pistol from the boxroom shelf, Bickton."

"I've been thinking about that, sir, and I can't see who can have taken it but the Captain himself. If any one else had taken it, he would have been sure to have missed it."

"That's all very well, Bickton, but if Captain Stanlake took the pistol himself, we can't get away from the suggestion of suicide. Now you must have known him better than anyone else in Brenthithe. Honestly, do you think that there is any likelihood of his having shot himself?"

"I can't imagine that he would ever have done such a thing, sir. He enjoyed life too much to put an end to it, and he was confident that he'd get his own way with the Commissioners. He can't have had any troubles about money, and he wasn't one to worry his head over trifles."

"I see. Well, Bickton, we won't keep you any longer from your steak and onions. That smell's made me feel quite hungry. Come along, Merrion, let's go and see if we can find a spot of dinner."

That evening in the privacy of the back room of the Lord Rodney, Arnold and Merrion discussed the possible identity of the mysterious lady.

"The natural inference is that Stanlake met her in the lounge of the King's Head," said Merrion. "I suggest that you interview your friend Mr. Yewdale again to-morrow, and get from him the list of his regular lady customers. But even if we succeed in finding out who she was, I don't believe that she'll be able to throw any light on Stanlake's death."

"I'm not sure about that?" Arnold replied. "While you were talking to Bickton just now, I was putting two and two together. We have a definite chain of facts. The officers of both the *Fulmar* and the *Merganser* were in the habit of using the lounge at the King's Head, and taking their wives with them. We know from Yewdale that on the occasions that Stanlake came into the lounge, he made himself pleasant to the ladies. Bickton tells us that before he was Harbour Master here, Stanlake was fond of ladies' society. One may assume, therefore, that he attracted them.

"Now we come to what I think is rather a significant point. The lady was seen in Stanlake's company on two occasions. I'm going to assume for the moment that it was the same lady. Now on neither of these occasions were the *Fulmar* or the *Merganser* in port. Rogers expressly mentioned that fact as evidence that he was doing no harm when the harbour man spoke to him. Yewdale took the opportunity of going into the Old Town on April 30th, because custom was slack. He attributed that to the fact that neither the *Fulmar* nor the *Merganser* were in port at the time. So much for the facts. Now, don't they suggest to you the possibility that Stanlake had struck up a friendship with the wife of one of the ships' officers?"

"It does. It struck me while we were talking to Bickton, and I still think that it's probably the case. And that's exactly why I can't see how the lady can have been the cause, direct or indirect, of Stanlake's death."

"But I can," said Arnold. "The lady's husband discovers the intrigue and determines to revenge himself upon Stanlake."

But Merrion shook his head. "That's just where the difficulty comes in," he replied. "You heard what I asked Bickton about people being shown into the boxroom? His reason for supposing that none of the ship's officers ever so much as peeped inside the place seems to me particularly convincing. Stanlake was desperately jealous of his tide-gauge and won't have risked letting a seaman, of all people, into the secret of it. How then could one of these officers have known where to lay his hand upon the pistol? The second objection is even more devastating. Once more, at the time when Stanlake was shot, neither the *Fulmar* nor the *Merganser* was in port."

Arnold threw himself wearily back in his chair. "This case is getting me down!" he exclaimed. "We get hold of one promising clue after another, follow it up and find ourselves hard up against a stone wall. I'm not at all sure that we haven't reached the point where we can prove the impossibility of anybody having shot Stanlake. The only alternative is that for some inexplicable reason he shot himself."

"That's the only logical conclusion, I know," Merrion replied. "And yet somehow I can't bring myself to accept it. You heard what Bickton said just now, and he's truthful enough when no question of damaging his late master's memory is involved. Besides, from all we've heard of the man, it's ridiculous to suppose that he put an end to himself in that way."

"Well, then, can't your imagination suggest some theory to account for his death?"

"An enemy hath done this thing. Of that I'm perfectly certain. And the trouble is that the man stirred up enmity from the very moment he arrived here. We needn't go all over that ground again, but the fact remains that the favourable opinions we've heard of him could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Bickton seems to have been genuinely attached to him. I don't altogether understand why, for Stanlake appears to have treated him rather queerly. We must suppose that the mysterious lady, since she was not adverse to meeting him alone in his rooms, must have been fascinated by him. Lastly, your friend Yewdale gave him a somewhat colourless testimonial. He said that he got on well enough with him. And that appears to exhaust the list of his friends. I'm not counting the fishermen, for their affection was for Stanlake as a symbol, rather than Stanlake as a man. He was, or has become since his death, the champion of the Old Town against the encroachments of the New."

"There must be a flaw in the argument somewhere," said Arnold. "We have assumed the time of Stanlake's death, as nine o'clock on Tuesday evening. Is there any possibility of our being mistaken?"

Merrion shook his head. "I don't think so," he replied. "Our estimate is based on statements from three independent witnesses. Bickton told us when Stanlake left his room, and Neddy the ferryman when he crossed the harbour. The excellent Timble confirms to some extent Neddy's evidence as to the finding of the body, and fixes the time of that fairly accurately. It's ridiculous to suppose that the three of them have conspired to mislead us. Stanlake must have died within a minute or two of nine o'clock, either way. If there's any flaw in the argument, I'm pretty sure it isn't there."

"Then where the devil is it? Every person, whose name one could possibly place on a list of suspects has a satisfactory alibi for that time. Take Major Metfield to begin with. He was at home in the bosom of his family, as I've taken the trouble to verify."

Merrion smiled. "Does the Chief Constable qualify for a place in the list of suspects?" he asked.

"Only because he made such an ass of himself on the night of the murder. Then we come to Pottern, concerning whom Stanlake held a dark secret. He was entertaining Sir Vincent and Lady Dewsbury to dinner at his house, The Mount, half-way between here and Brent Royal. Timble obtained that bit of information for me.

"The alibis of the officers of the *Fulmar* and the *Merganser* are obvious enough. Holden and Grimstead were in the Yacht Club house, as plenty of

people are ready to testify. Neddy the ferryman was in the Topsail Schooner snatching a drink while expecting Stanlake's return. Dr. Nately was in his surgery in the Old Town, where the summons from the mortuary reached him. Jack Rogers's own statement as to his whereabouts is not very convincing, but Yewdale's independent evidence as to the time he left the Frigate clears him. Finally, Bickton can't possibly have followed Stanlake to the end of the jetty and got back to No. 47 High Street without having been seen crossing the harbour in one direction at least. I don't include the mysterious lady on the list of suspects, for we're both agreed that the crime was certainly not a woman's job.

"The only possible conclusion is that the murderer was somebody we haven't yet heard of and whom nobody has thought of suspecting. And that seems almost incredible to me. It isn't as if some casual person could have met Stanlake at the end of the jetty by chance and taken a pot-shot at him by way of settling old scores. This crime was prepared in advance, as is proved by the abstraction of the pistol, the laborious making of ammunition for it, and the cutting of the wires of the tide-gauge on the previous night. That's the argument built up from established facts. Can you see any flaw in it?"

"No, I can't," Merrion replied. "Perhaps that's because I'm too sleepy after the strenuous day we've had. Let's go to bed in the hope that our brains will be more fertile when we wake up."

The next morning when Merrion joined Arnold at the breakfast table he was in an unusually thoughtful mood. "I've got an idea," he announced. "I'm not quite sure whether I dreamt it or whether it came to me while I was half asleep. Anyway, it's far too unsubstantial to be worth explaining to you yet. What are your plans for this morning?"

"I'm going to see Yewdale at the Frigate on the off-chance of getting some clue to the lady with the husky voice."

"All right. Suppose we rendezvous at the Central Restaurant between one and half-past, as we did yesterday. Meanwhile I'll do a little investigating on my own. What's become of the key of the gate leading on to the end of the jetty?"

"I sent it back to the harbour office by Timble. If you want to borrow it I'll give you a note to him asking him to fetch it for you."

"I do rather want to have another look at that tide-gauge and its surroundings. But don't build up any great hopes of my finding anything new. It's just to satisfy that ridiculous idea of mine."

Arnold scribbled a few lines on the back of one of his cards and gave it to Merrion, who forthwith departed. The Inspector made his way to the Frigate where he found Mr. Yewdale polishing the counter in the bar.

"Sorry to interrupt you when you're busy," he said, "but there are one or two further questions I want to ask you."

"Don't apologise," Yewdale replied. "I've plenty of time to finish my job before the place opens. Sit down, and if there's anything I can tell you I'm at your service."

"Thanks very much. Let's begin with the evening of April 30th last. You told me, if you remember, that you went into the New Town from the King's Head and came back by the last chain ferry. Did you speak to anyone as you were crossing the harbour on your way back?"

"Let me see. Yes, I did, now I come to think about it. I met Bickton, Stanlake's servant, and had a few words with him. I haven't seen him since I left the King's Head, but he was an occasional customer in the public bar when I was there."

"What is your opinion of Bickton?"

"He always struck me as a steady, reserved sort of chap. He seems to have hit it off pretty well with Stanlake, which is more than a good many people would have done in his place. But then I believe he'd been with him before and knew pretty well how to take him. I understand that he'd been a steward in the same ship as Stanlake."

"So he told me. Now between ourselves, Mr. Yewdale, Bickton saw the lady who was in Stanlake's company that evening."

"Did he!" Yewdale exclaimed. "I bet he didn't dare to breathe a whisper about her while Stanlake was alive. If I asked you who she was you wouldn't tell me, I suppose, Inspector?"

"I don't know myself. Bickton swears that he didn't recognise her, and I think he's telling the truth. But it's occurred to me that Stanlake may have met her originally in your lounge at the King's Head. And that's where I want your help."

"It would take me a week to remember all the ladies I've seen in that lounge. And then I should overlook some of them. Time was, not so many years ago, that I was so full every night there wasn't an empty chair to be seen. But trade's fallen off terribly since then. That's why I left the place and came here. The Old Town's dying, Inspector, and that's a fact. Stanlake

might have saved it if he'd lived, but now that he's dead I don't see any hope for it."

"Stanlake only came here at the end of last year. He can't have met all the people who used to use the lounge."

"That's true enough. Let me think now. If Stanlake first met the lady in my lounge, it must have been before April 30th, mustn't it? And during the winter months the lounge was always fairly quiet. The only ladies that I can think of that came in at all regularly were the wives of the ships' officers. Captain Frimley of the *Fulmar* often used to bring his wife in, a fine-looking woman she is. He's quite a young chap and she's no older. Sometimes they brought another lady in with them. I don't know who she was, a relation most likely. Then there was Captain Sneyd of the *Merganser*. He's a jolly old boy, who'd make you die laughing at his stories. He used to spend a lot of time in the lounge with his Chief Engineer, whose name I can't recall for the moment. And always on sailing day their two wives would meet them there."

"That's four ladies to begin with. Did Stanlake meet them all?"

"I can't say that for certain, but I should think that he must have done. He was a pretty regular customer for his ginger ale in the middle of the day before he went home to dinner. He didn't get on very well with the *Merganser* crowd, though. I've heard it said that he upset them in some way when he first came here. There's no denying that he made himself a bit officious at times. But he seemed to get on all right with Captain Frimley."

"Were Stanlake and Frimley on definitely friendly terms?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that. You must understand that a landlord hears a lot of things said one way or another. Some of it may be true and most of it probably isn't. Stanlake and Frimley were always polite enough to one another when they met in the lounge. But I've heard that Stanlake fell foul of Frimley more than once outside; officially, if you understand my meaning. Stanlake wasn't the sort of man to stand for any disobedience to his orders. He'd got a rough side to his tongue and that's where a good many folk didn't like him."

"Captain Frimley has a house here on shore somewhere, I suppose? Can you tell me where it is?"

"He lives in Seaview Terrace. That's the fourth turning on the right as you go up Atlantic Avenue. I don't know the number, but anyone will tell

you. He and Mrs. Frimley dropped in here to see me for a minute on Monday last, the day the *Fulmar* sailed."

"Do you happen to know when the *Fulmar* is expected back?"

"Next Monday or Tuesday, I expect. Captain Frimley told me that he was bound to Goole with a cargo of cement and was coming back with coal. He said that he expected to be away about a week."

Arnold thanked Mr. Yewdale and left the Frigate. Following his directions he walked to Seaview Terrace, which he found to be a row of neat little houses most of which had cards in their windows bearing the word "Apartments." He called at the first of these, and in reply to his inquiry for Captain Frimley's address was directed to No. 14.

The door of No. 14 was opened to him by a trim little maid who showed him into a bright and cheerful room looking out over the harbour. A minute or two later Mrs. Frimley came in, looking very much astonished at this unexpected visit from an officer of Scotland Yard. "What is it that you want to see me about, Inspector?" she asked.

Arnold knew at once that this could not be the lady with the husky voice, for Mrs. Frimley's tones were as clear and ringing as a bell.

"I must apologise most heartily for this intrusion," he said. "As I dare say you've guessed already I have been sent here to investigate Captain Stanlake's death. In the course of that investigation it is my duty to interview everyone who knew him, however slightly. You and your husband were acquainted with him, of course?"

"Well, yes, I suppose we were," Mrs. Frimley said in a tone of reluctance. "But I'm not going to pretend that we ever liked him."

"Was your husband on friendly terms with him?"

"Oh, he usually managed to put up with him. John—that's my husband—is a very easy-going person, and it takes a good deal to upset him. Besides, it would have made things very awkward if he had quarrelled openly with the Harbour Master. When Captain Stanlake first came here John did his very best to be matey with him, but it didn't seem to come off, somehow. Since then they were usually polite enough to one another, though Captain Stanlake was terribly tiresome and officious at times."

"Did you actively dislike him, Mrs. Frimley?"

"I can't say that I actively disliked him. I never saw enough of him for that. I used to meet him sometimes when my husband took me into the

lounge of the King's Head by the fish market. He was always polite enough then, but there was an air of superiority about him which used to irritate me."

"Your husband went to see him at his rooms in High Street, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did, once or twice, when he first came; but Captain Stanlake didn't give him any encouragement, so he left off going."

"He seems to have been a curious character, and his rooms are as queer as he was. Have you ever been to them?"

Mrs. Frimley shook her head. "Not I," she replied. "If John was not particularly welcome there, I should have been still less. Captain Stanlake maintained a strictly bachelor establishment, I understand."

Arnold smiled. "Captain Stanlake didn't err on the side of hospitality, from all that I've been told," he said.

"Not at his rooms, perhaps, but I've known him offer us a drink when we met him in the lounge of the King's Head."

"By us, you mean your husband and yourself, I suppose, Mrs. Frimley?"

"And anyone we happened to have with us. Mrs. Leyland, for instance."

"Mrs. Leyland?" Arnold repeated inquiringly.

"Yes, Mr. Leyland is Chief Engineer on the *Fulmar*, John's ship. He never took Mrs. Leyland about anywhere, so we used to take pity on her sometimes and ask her to come with us."

"Yet another acquaintance of Captain Stanlake's," said Arnold with a sigh. "I shall have to go and see her, I suppose, just as a matter of routine. Would you mind giving me her address?"

Mrs. Frimley looked at him penetratingly. "I can't do that, I'm afraid," she replied.

"Why, surely you know where she lives, don't you, Mrs. Frimley!" Arnold exclaimed.

"I know where she used to live. The Leylands have a house not more than a few minutes' walk from here. But May—that's Mrs. Leyland—isn't there now."

"I wonder what you mean by that exactly, Mrs. Frimley," said Arnold quietly.

Mrs. Frimley shook her head. "I simply hate gossiping about my friends," she exclaimed. "For the first time in my life I'm dreading the return of the *Fulmar*. It'll all come out then, of course, and people will say horrid things about May, who isn't in the least to blame."

"When do you expect the *Fulmar* back, Mrs. Frimley?"

"I had a letter from John this morning. He hopes to leave Goole this evening or to-morrow morning, and if he makes a good passage he ought to be here on Tuesday morning's tide."

"Then if the mystery you hint of is to become public property then, surely there'd be no harm in telling me about it now, in the strictest confidence, of course. It isn't part of a policeman's job to spread gossip, you know."

Mrs. Frimley smiled faintly. "I'll risk it," she replied. "It's nothing whatever to do with your investigations, though. The plain fact is that on the very evening the *Fulmar* sailed, last Monday, that was, May packed up her suitcase and walked out of the house for good and all."

"What made her do that? Had she quarrelled with her husband?"

"Not more violently than usual, as far as I know. I'd better tell you the whole story, then you'll understand. The Leylands haven't been married very long, not more than a couple of years. May was staying in Brenthithe by herself when they first met and somehow became acquainted. The first we knew of it was when Mr. Leyland brought May Charlton to this house and told John and me that they were going to be married. We were both so thunderstruck that we almost forgot to congratulate them."

"People will get married in spite of the awful warnings which surround them," said Arnold gloomily.

"Now don't be so sarcastic, Inspector. There are plenty of happy marriages, as you know well enough. But what surprised John and me so much was that Mr. Leyland should have had the courage even to speak to May. Ever since we'd known him, and that was a good many years, he'd been simply terrified at the very sight of a woman. He'd got used to me, to the extent that he wouldn't run away when I appeared, but whenever I spoke to him he stammered and blushed like a shy schoolboy. And here he was, introducing us to May and telling us as bold as brass that they were going to get married.

"Well, they did get married at the register office, next time the *Fulmar* was in port. John and I were the only witnesses. May told me that she had no

near relations and that she wasn't going to worry her friends with her affairs. And after it was all over they settled down in a house which they had found for themselves.

"I'd hardly got used to the idea of their being married when I saw for myself that it wouldn't answer. Mr. Leyland had been perfectly happy as a bachelor, with all his wants attended to and nobody else's point of view to consider. He's a thoroughly self-centred man with no interest beyond his profession and his own comforts. All he asks is to be left to his own devices and not to be worried.

"But May's entirely different. If he'd hunted through the length and breadth of England, I don't suppose that he could have found anyone less suited to him. She's a good deal younger than he is, pretty, bright and never happy unless she's being amused. And she's one of those unfortunate people who don't know how to amuse themselves. She must always have someone on hand to do the job for her, and if there isn't any one on hand, she gets irritable and bad-tempered. Mr. Leyland's temper isn't of the sunniest, so you may imagine that they didn't hit it off like a pair of cooing doves."

"I can imagine it very well," Arnold remarked.

"Then I needn't describe what they were like together. May took to me because I used to sympathise with her, I suppose. She used to come here and pour out her troubles and I'd take her to the pictures and cheer her up. That was when her husband was at sea, of course. He didn't like her going out. If he'd had his way, he'd have kept her at home under lock and key all the time. I believe he thinks that woman was created solely to wait upon the nobler sex.

"However, that's by the way. About a month ago May came to me and told me that she couldn't stick it any longer. It seems that she'd had a proper dust-up with her husband, who'd come over all cave-manly. Threatened to beat her within an inch of her life if she didn't mend her ways, and that sort of thing. She told me that as soon as she'd had time to make her arrangements she'd leave Brenthithe for good and all and we should never see her again."

"Did she tell you what these arrangements were?" Arnold asked.

"No, she wouldn't say anything about them. She didn't want me to know where she was going in case I should put her husband on her track. She told me that she had a little money of her own—enough to keep her. She made me swear that I wouldn't repeat to John what she had told me, and after that

she never said another word about it. Until I began to think, that she'd thought better of it."

"When did you last see Mrs. Leyland?"

"On Monday evening. John and I had supper about seven o'clock, and then we got the car out to drive down to the *Fulmar*. I always see him off if I can possibly manage it. John had told me that Mr. Leyland had been on board since early in the afternoon, so I suggested that we should call for May and ask her to come down with us. We went round there, but May wouldn't come. In fact, she practically banged the door in our faces. I noticed at the time that she had her hat and coat on, but I supposed that she was going out to the pictures or somewhere and didn't think any more about it.

"John and I went aboard. John had a word with Mr. Leyland and then he and I went to the King's Head. It was more comfortable than sitting in John's cabin and, of course, it was quite close to the berth where the *Fulmar* was lying. We stayed there until closing time and then walked back to the *Fulmar*."

"Did you see Captain Stanlake while you were in the King's Head?" Arnold asked.

"No, we didn't. He didn't happen to come in. When we got back to the *Fulmar* we saw Mr. Leyland. He was in the boat doing something to the ship's side. When we got on board John spoke to him, and he said that something had gone wrong with the condenser out-fall, but that he'd managed to get it right. John and the watchman helped him to hoist the boat on board and then he went down into the engine-room. I haven't seen him since."

"What did you do after that, Mrs. Frimley?"

"I sat with John in his cabin until it was time to catch the last chain ferry, which leaves the Old Town at half-past eleven. John saw me as far as the car, which was parked in the fish market, and I drove back here. I looked in the letter-box as I always do, and there was a note from May addressed to me. I've got it here if you'd like to see it."

She walked to a bureau, opened it and produced a sheet of note-paper which she handed to Arnold. The paper bore no date or address, and its message was hastily scribbled in pencil.

"DARLING CARRIE,—I hope I wasn't rude when you and John called just now, but I had a lot of things to do and not much time to do them in. I'm leaving Brenthithe by the evening train and I'll drop this in your letter-box as I go by. I'm not going to tell even you where I'm going and I'm not going to say good-bye for ever, for when the fuss has all blown over I'll write to you again. I know I can trust you to say nothing about this even to John until the *Fulmar* comes back.

"Your devoted

"MAY.

"P.S.—I've told the tradesmen that I'm going on the *Fulmar* this trip, so nobody will be surprised to find the house shut up."

Arnold handed the note back to Mrs. Frimley. "You've heard nothing further, of course?" he remarked.

"Nothing at all; but I did go round next morning to see that May had really gone. The house was all locked up and the blinds drawn."

Arnold frowned. "Do you know, Mrs. Frimley, I'm not altogether happy about it," he said. "You see, there's no evidence that Mrs. Leyland really did leave Brenthithe."

"Then why on earth should she have written me that note? Besides, she told me weeks ago that she meant to run away."

"I dare say. But that may have been only a subterfuge. I'm not at all sure that it isn't my duty to inform the local police. They may think it advisable to search the house."

Mrs. Frimley's face went suddenly white as the Inspector's meaning dawned upon her. "You don't mean——!" she exclaimed, and then after an instant's pause, she laughed at her own fears. "Oh, no, May would never do a thing like that," she continued. "She was much too fond of life and all that it meant to her. She'd realised that she couldn't stay any longer with her husband, that's all. I wish I'd never said anything about it to you now. If you tell anyone in Brenthithe I shall feel that I've broken my promise to May. I'll tell you what. Do you really want to see inside the house, Inspector?"

"I should feel a good deal happier if someone looked round it," Arnold replied.

"Very well, then. I noticed when I was round there on Tuesday morning that May had forgotten to shut the scullery window right down. It's just like

her to lock all the doors and leave a window unfastened. You could easily push it up and get in that way. I'll come with you and show you if you like."

"I think on the whole I'd better go by myself," Arnold replied.

He obtained the address and whereabouts of the house, and then turned to go. "Oh, by the way," he said casually. "Has Mrs. Leyland got a husky voice?"

Mrs. Frimley looked slightly puzzled at this question. "Well, she does talk as if she had something the matter with her throat," she replied. "You'll be sure and come back here and tell me if—if you find anything?"

"I'll come back in any case, Mrs. Frimley," Arnold replied.

CHAPTER XIII

PYROTECHNICS

ARNOLD went straight to the Leylands' house and made his way round to the back door. He found to his relief that the scullery window was screened by a high wall and was not overlooked. Mrs. Frimley's observation had not been at fault. The lower sash of the window was slightly raised, leaving a gap of an inch between it and the sill.

It took the Inspector only a few seconds to raise the sash and wriggle his way through the opening. Once inside the house he made straight for the kitchen. Here his worst fears were set at rest, for the door of the gas oven was closed.

He then proceeded to examine the house at his leisure. The furniture it contained was cheap and tawdry and the whole place was, as he muttered to himself, in the devil of a mess. Mrs. Leyland had evidently made herself a cup of tea before her departure, and the tea things were standing unwashed upon the table. This was fully in keeping with the appearance of the rest of the house. Cigarette ends and matchsticks were everywhere, and bits of paper littered the floors. In what had evidently been the Leylands' bedroom, the chest of drawers lay open and a single silk stocking, badly laddered, hung from the gas bracket. The bed had not been made, and the wash basin was half-full of dirty water.

"She might have tidied up the place before she went," Arnold muttered. "Well, I may as well have a good look round now I'm here, I suppose."

His search occupied fully half an hour, but was utterly void of results. He found nothing whatever to connect the Leylands in any way with Captain Stanlake. He left the house by the way he had come and returned to Seaview Terrace, where he reassured Mrs. Frimley.

"There's no sign of Mrs. Leyland," he said; "but when her husband comes back he'll find the house in the very dickens of a pickle."

"It's very good of you to come back and tell me, Inspector," said Mrs. Frimley. "I knew it would be all right, really, but after what you said I

couldn't help feeling a little bit anxious. I dare say the house is in a pickle. May was always terrible untidy, that's one of the things her husband used to grumble about. Now I'm wondering what'll happen when he comes back and finds that she's gone. Do you think I ought to let him see the note she wrote to me?"

"That's a matter you'd better discuss with your husband, Mrs. Frimley," Arnold replied tactfully.

He left the house and walked thoughtfully to the Central Restaurant to keep his appointment with Merrion. He had acquired some very interesting information, but his investigation had not been forwarded in the slightest degree. The mystery of Stanlake's death was no nearer solution.

He found Merrion waiting for him and the two sat down to lunch. But something about his friend's expression aroused the Inspector's mistrust.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "You look as if you'd got something up your sleeve."

"I have," Merrion replied, "but never mind about that just now. I'll produce it at the right moment. How did you get on this morning?"

"Well, I think I've discovered the identity of Stanlake's mysterious lady. I've been listening to a lot of gossip since I saw you last. I'll repeat it to you if you care to listen."

He gave Merrion a rapid but accurate account of his interview with Mrs. Frimley. "I don't think there can be much doubt that this Mrs. Leyland is the lady in question," he concluded. "She seems to be a pretty frivolous sort of person, thoroughly fed up with her husband, and she probably turned to Stanlake for a little light relief. But the fact that she's bolted from Brenthithe doesn't suggest that she intended Stanlake as a permanent alternative."

"By jove!" Merrion exclaimed with unaccustomed gravity. "All that is really amazingly interesting."

"It's interesting enough, but its value to us is only negative. If Mrs. Leyland left Brenthithe on Monday evening, and I don't think there's any room for doubt that she did, she can't have had anything to do with Stanlake's death twenty-four hours later. Nor can we make anything of the theory of the jealous husband, for Leyland sailed on the *Fulmar* a few hours after his wife's departure. Besides, I searched the Leylands' house from top to bottom, and there's nothing to suggest that either of them had anything to do with the crime. I didn't, for instance, find a tool in the house, much less a lathe on which that bullet could have been turned."

Merrion smiled. “I’ll trust your powers of observation,” he said. “I’m quite ready to believe that you found nothing whatever to connect either of the Leylands with Stanlake’s death. For the matter of that, there’s only one fact which identifies Mrs. Leyland with the mysterious lady, and that’s her voice.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” Arnold objected. “There are several other facts which must be taken into account. Mrs. Leyland met Stanlake when she was in the Frimleys’ company at the King’s Head. We know of two visits of the mysterious lady to his rooms, and both of these occurred when the *Fulmar* was at sea. Mrs. Leyland was on bad terms with her husband. She was always looking for someone to amuse her and she may have found Stanlake ready to oblige. She lived in the New Town and Stanlake had to put the mysterious lady across the harbour in his own launch after the ferries had stopped running. All these things seem to me highly suggestive, but as I said before they don’t lead us anywhere.”

“Every scrap of information must lead somewhere,” Merrion replied sententiously. “What do you propose to do after lunch?”

Arnold shrugged his shoulders. “I’m blest if I know,” he replied. “I seem to have come to a dead end. Every fresh fact I unearth seems to make it less likely that Stanlake can have been murdered. Take this Leyland business as the latest example. If Mrs. Leyland was the mysterious lady, her husband had a rational motive for killing Stanlake. But he can’t have done the job, for he was miles away on the high seas at the time the shot was fired.”

“The darkest hour is nearest the dawn,” said Merrion cryptically. “What you want is something to keep your mind from brooding. A nice walk down by the sea, for instance. You’ve had hardly any exercise since you’ve been here. The air was topping on the jetty this morning. It’s given me such an appetite that I’m going to have another piece of cheese.”

“Oh, yes. Timble found you that key all right, I suppose?”

“Yes, thanks; I’ve got it in my pocket at this very moment.”

“The devil you have! You ought to have returned it to the harbour office when you’d done with it.”

“Sorry; I thought it would be more in order if you returned it in person. I tell you what. We’ll take a bus to the Topsail Schooner and then walk to the end of the jetty and back. It’ll do you all the good in the world. And after that, you can return the key with many thanks.”

Arnold agreed without any marked show of enthusiasm. “We may as well do that as anything else, I suppose. I don’t know what move to make next, and your imagination hasn’t proved so fertile as usual. Let’s make a start if we’re going.”

By the time they reached the Topsail Schooner the sky had clouded over and a fine rain was falling.

“All the better,” said Merrion cheerfully, “We shall have the jetty to ourselves, and a little moisture won’t hurt us. Come along, and I’ll promise to show you something that will stimulate your jaded brain.”

As they walked along the jetty, Merrion pointed across Bollard Bay. “Most of the evidence of yesterday morning’s affair has been removed, you’ll notice,” he said. “The lighter’s been shifted, for instance. I dropped into the Topsail Schooner before I met you just now and they told me that the tug belonging to the Brent Royal Cement Company came along at high water this morning and towed it back up the harbour. They’re going to set a watchman on board to see that it doesn’t happen again. Everyone’s wondering what the fishermen will be up to next. They’re not likely to sit down quietly after their repulse yesterday afternoon.”

“It’s a wonder to me that they haven’t started trouble again before now,” said Arnold gloomily.

“There’s a very good reason for their having made no sign. Fishermen, like everybody else, have got to earn their living. They certainly took a holiday for the funeral yesterday, but they can’t do that every day. At the moment they’re all out fishing. From the end of the jetty you can see their boats in the distance out at sea. They won’t go out to-morrow because it’s Sunday, and that’s when you may expect the fun to begin.”

“Well, it’s the Chief Constable’s business and not mine,” Arnold growled. “Oh, damn this rain! Let’s go back and sit under shelter somewhere.”

“No, let’s stick it out until we get to the end of the jetty. It’s only a few yards farther. I promised to show you something that would make it worth your while.”

“I’m not a bit interested in those confounded fishing-boats, if that’s what you mean.”

Merrion smiled. “Shall I remind you of those immortal words, ‘Wait and see’?” he replied.

They trudged on in silence until they reached the barrier which protected the end of the jetty. Then Merrion became suddenly loquacious.

"We're now on the spot where Stanlake was standing when he was shot," he said. "At least all the available evidence leads us to believe that we are. Now I want you to look at the top bar of this iron gate. It's a little bit above your head, I know, but if you stand on the lower bar you can see it plainly enough."

"I can see the bar all right from where I am," Arnold growled. "What's the matter with it?"

"As a bar there's nothing the matter with it. It's a good stout iron rod and it's been kept painted to prevent it rusting. In fact, if you notice, you will see that the whole of the barrier and the gate have been painted within the last year or so. I shouldn't wonder if Stanlake had been responsible. Just the sort of chap who'd have had an eye for a detail like that."

"Did you bring me all the way out here just to show me that this confounded ironwork had been recently painted?"

"That was one of my reasons," Merrion replied imperturbably. "I assure you that it's a much more important fact than appears at first sight. Just to please me, do stand on that lower bar for a moment. Now, have a look at the top bar, just where your right hand is resting. Do you see anything there?"

Arnold with unconcealed ill-grace looked at the spot which Merrion had indicated. "I can't see anything," he replied. "There's a black ring round the bar, that's all."

"How was that black ring caused?"

"Damned if I know or care. It looks as if it had been burnt into the paint. As if someone had taken a red-hot nail and run the point round it."

"That's a very good description," said Merrion approvingly. "All right, you can step down now. Half a minute while I get the gate unlocked, and then we'll go through and look at the beacon."

Arnold shrugged his shoulders. He had discovered from past experience that it was best to humour his friend when he was in this mood. Merrion led the way to the beacon, which was an iron tripod surmounted by a lantern.

"This has been recently painted, too, you'll notice," he said. "Probably at the same time as the barrier and the gate. Now just look at the leg of the tripod right in front of you. Your friend with the red-hot nail seems to have

been busy here, too. There's no need to climb this time, for the marks of his handiwork are just about on a level with your eyes. See?"

"Yes, I see," Arnold replied wearily. "There's no doubt about the paintwork having been burnt. But this doesn't look as if it had been done with a red-hot nail. The marks of the burning are in a spiral round the leg of the tripod, just as if a red-hot wire had been wrapped round it."

"Once more your description is the height of accuracy. That's just what it does look like. Now there's just one other observation I want you to make and then we'll go back. How far is that burnt mark from the extreme tip of the jetty?"

"Ten feet more or less."

"That's what I made it this morning. Now if you draw a line between those two points, you will notice that it clears the line of the tide-gauge, which is slightly to one side. The dial isn't square with the jetty. It's set so as to face out to sea. The reason for that, of course, is that it was intended to show incoming ships the depth of water over the bar."

"I'm prepared to believe it. And now perhaps you'll explain the reason of all this nonsense."

"It's rather a long story, and we should be wet through by the time I came to the end of it. Let's go back and give up the key at the harbour office. Then, while we're that side of the water, we may as well go to the police station and hold a little conference in the Chief Constable's room. Since it's Saturday afternoon, I think we can count on it being available."

"I want to go there in any case," said Arnold. "It's time I wrote a report of some kind, though I'm blest if I know what I'm going to put in it."

As Merrion had anticipated, the Chief Constable was not at the police station, and they made themselves comfortable in his room.

"Well, get on with your fairy-story," said Arnold. "We may as well sit here as anywhere else."

"I'd better tell the story as it unfolded itself to me," Merrion replied. "You remember our conversation with Jack Rogers on the Parade yesterday morning? I was thinking about it in bed last night and wondering how much of it was true, and how much wasn't. The thing that stuck in my gizzard most was his account of that red glow that climbed up the side of the jetty. My first instinct was to dismiss the whole thing as a figment of Rogers's imagination. He'd certainly had too much to drink by the time he got on

board *Ianthe*. But though I've heard of a drunken man seeing blue rats, I've never heard of one who saw a marine glow-worm. On the other hand, he had nothing to gain by inventing such a ridiculous story.

"So I set to work to find some possible explanation. He described the light like the burning end of a cigarette. Now, no phosphorescence could ever look in the least like that. Nor, as he himself said, could a cigarette end climb up the jetty by itself. Finally, if the cigarette had been in the mouth of a man climbing up the jetty Rogers would have seen at least his outline. And then at last I had a brainwave. You've got that pistol put away in a drawer here somewhere, haven't you? Fetch it out and let's have another look at it."

With a sigh Arnold produced the pistol and handed it to Merrion. "Surely we've been over all this ground before, haven't we?" he said.

"We have, but with unenlightened eyes. Just look once more at this bit of twine that's tied to the trigger."

Merrion picked up the end of the twine and passed it through his fingers. "You see what it is," he continued. "Good stout serving twine. It's the kind of thing you more often see on board ship than ashore. I dare say, for instance, that old Rumwell has plenty of it in that extraordinary shop of his. And it's strong too, just the very thing to withstand a good stout pull. But who tied it round the trigger? And why? And how did the end come to be charred like this?"

"I can make a guess at answering the last part of your question," Arnold replied. "Whoever tied the string round the trigger hadn't got a knife on him but he had got a box of matches. Being unable to break the twine and having nothing to cut it with, he burnt it through with a match."

"Possibly," said Merrion: "but I've got another theory about that. Now I'm going to perform a simple experiment for your benefit."

He took from his pocket a length of twine very similar in appearance to the piece tied to the trigger of the pistol. "I bought this at that little shop by the Harbour Office where they sell fishing tackle and so forth," he said. "Now, if you don't mind, we'll shut the window and draw the blind. It's lucky it's such a dull day, for we can make the room quite dark. Now then, watch!"

He struck a match and held it to the loose end of the length of twine. The twine caught fire but Merrion blew out the flame at once. The twine, however, continued to smoulder with a red glow distinctly visible in the darkened room, and burnt slowly away leaving very little ash.

"There you are!" said Merrion triumphantly. "Jack Rogers's marine glow-worm. In other words, a common slow match."

"Here, that won't do," Arnold exclaimed. "I suppose you're going to suggest that the pistol was set off with a slow match? But if Rogers is to be trusted he saw his confounded glow-worm several minutes after the time when Stanlake was shot."

Merrion shook his head. "You haven't quite tumbled to it yet," he replied. "We proceed to extinguish the glowing end of the smouldering twine by plunging it into the ink-pot. So. Of course, I've treated this twine or it wouldn't have gone on glowing like that. And a very simple treatment it was. I bought a couple of pennyworth of saltpetre from the chemist, made a strong solution with water, soaked the twine in it and dried it in the sun. The whole process didn't take half an hour. But it produced a very satisfactory slow match. The whole of that length of twine would have smouldered away if I hadn't extinguished the glowing end.

"Now I'm willing to bet that the piece of twine tied round the trigger had been similarly treated. But the pistol was recovered from the sea where it had lain for some considerable time. This would have soaked the saltpetre out of the twine again, and I don't suppose you'd be able to find any trace of it now. We'll carry out one more experiment, if we can find the necessary apparatus."

Merrion went to the window and drew up the blinds. "By jove, the very thing!" he exclaimed. "I've always noticed that the police have a perfect passion for putting up iron bars in front of their windows. Heaven knows what they were originally meant for. Were they to keep the Chief Constable in, or to prevent him from being attacked by the infuriated populace without? You ought to be able to tell me."

"I haven't the slightest idea," Arnold replied impatiently. "For goodness' sake get on with whatever you're going to do."

"I'm going to select a point on one of these bars where the paint is still in fairly good condition. The Watch Committee or whoever looks after this place isn't half so careful as our late Harbour Master. I shouldn't think that these bars had had a coat of paint for twenty years. However, here's a place that will answer our purpose. Now then, watch me closely to see that there is no deception."

He cut a piece off his length of twine and wrapped it round one of the iron bars protecting the windows. He then applied a match to this piece of

twine and blew out the flame. The twine smouldered away and in a few seconds was entirely consumed.

"Now come and have a look at the bar," said Merrion quietly. "You'll find a black spiral burnt into the paint. Does that remind you of anything you've seen this afternoon?"

"It's very much like that mark you showed me on the leg of the tripod," Arnold replied.

"And you described that as looking as if someone had wrapped a red-hot wire around the ironwork. Well, it wasn't a red-hot wire, but the end of a slow match. Now perhaps, you see why all the alibis in this case of yours are less substantial than a house of cards."

Arnold rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I'm beginning to," he replied. "But let's have the complete theory in your own words."

"All right, then. Our principal difficulty all along has been that according to the evidence no one but Stanlake can have been on the end of the jetty at the time he was shot, and that he was shot at close range, so short that the murderer cannot have been more than a few feet away. The only conclusion was that Stanlake must have held the weapon himself, and I'm perfectly certain that but for this little bit of twine tied to the trigger, the ultimate verdict would have been suicide.

"That piece of twine, coupled with Rogers's vision of his marine glow-worm, gave me the clue. The piece of twine showed signs of burning. Would the glowing end conform to Rogers's description? Certainly not in the ordinary way. A piece of untreated twine would either burn with a flame or go out in a very short time. But if the twine had been treated with saltpetre or something similar it would have burnt away like a cigarette.

"Then in the early hours of the morning the full possibility dawned upon me. I saw how Stanlake might have been shot without the presence of any other human being on the jetty. That's why I asked for the key of the gate. I wanted to look for something which, if my theory was correct, I ought to find. I found it and I was perfectly satisfied.

"You've tumbled to the trick by this time, of course. Remember that from the first everything showed that Stanlake was shot as he was in the act of opening the gate. The gate opens outwards and he had therefore to pull it towards him. The criminal, who must be credited with considerable ingenuity, knew that.

"Again, we deduced that the wires of the tide-gauge must have been cut somewhere about half-past ten on Monday evening. The criminal cut them, of course, and that was the only visit he paid to the end of the jetty. That's the important point to realise. He wasn't there at all on Tuesday evening. He had no need to be, since all his preparations had been made nearly twenty-four hours earlier.

"On Monday evening then, he equipped himself with the necessary apparatus. The pistol was already in his possession, and he had prepared the ammunition for it. He took these with him and also a hank of twine prepared as a slow match.

"When he reached the end of the jetty the first thing he did was to lash the pistol not too tightly to the leg of the tripod. For lashing he used the prepared twine, and he took care that the muzzle of the pistol should be pointing straight at the gate, about the level of a man's head. Then he tied one end of another piece of twine to the trigger of the pistol and led this piece round the hammer, along the lashing, and as far as the top bar of the gate, where he made it fast. I dare say he disguised the pistol with a piece of rag also soaked in saltpetre, but of that I've no proof. Then he cut the wires of the tide-gauge and went back to his own place, perfectly satisfied with his evening's work. As well he might be, for he had contrived a very effective man-trap.

"The fact that the tide-gauge was out of order could not be discovered at the earliest until daylight the following morning. That gave the criminal ample time in which to establish an alibi. He didn't care much how soon after that Stanlake went to investigate the trouble. It was odds against the Harbour Master noticing the length of twine running to the top bar of the gate. If he had, he would never have suspected its purpose. I'm pretty sure that the pistol must have been muffled up in a rag or something. Stanlake would have seen that something had been fixed to the leg of the tripod, but he would never guess what it was. He'd be all the more anxious to pull the gate open and find out who'd been playing tricks with his beloved tide-gauge.

"As it happened Stanlake didn't reach the end of the jetty until it was getting dark on Tuesday. He unlocked the gate and pulled it towards him, thus stretching the twine and firing the pistol. The bullet entered his head as we know and that was that.

"But what happened to the pistol and the twine? The pistol kicked itself clear of the lashing and recoiled into the sea. The criminal hadn't reckoned

on that happening. What he had designed was this. The twine passing round the hammer would be caught in the back-flash, as actually happened. Then it would gradually smoulder away at both ends, the longer end would ignite the lashing and set that smouldering too. It would burn away as far as the gate and leave no trace. Similarly the shorter end would burn away until it reached the trigger, also leaving no trace. When the lashing was burnt through, the pistol would fall to the ground, and the rag covering it would smoulder away leaving nothing but a little ash, to be blown away by the slightest breath of wind.

"Everything went according to plan, except for the unforeseen recoil of the pistol. The prepared twine was ignited by the flash and began to smoulder away leaving practically no trace; the fact that it happened to be raining did not matter in the least. A shower of rain would not wash the saltpetre out of the twine, nor would it extinguish it as it smouldered. But actual immersion in the sea would do both. Hence the piece of twine with the burnt end which you still see attached to the trigger.

"Now you understand what Rogers saw. The longer piece of twine, reaching from the pistol back to the gate, had been blown over the side of the jetty and one end hung down nearly touching the water. The other end of the twine, of course, still remained attached to the gate. As this slow match burnt away, so the red glow would climb up the jetty and over the top, exactly as Rogers described it. The whole length of twine eventually burnt away completely, leaving no trace beyond the black ring round the top bar of the gate. By this time the piece of twine that had been used to lash the pistol to the leg of the tripod had also burnt away. Any ash that there may have been would have been blown away as fast as it was produced."

"It's a clever enough dodge," said Arnold; "but who did it? That's the next point."

"Consider first of all why the dodge was adopted," Merrion replied. "Part of the idea of course was to make it appear that Stanlake had committed suicide. If Stanlake had pulled open the gate in broad daylight the illusion would have been just as complete. Witnesses might have heard the report and seen Stanlake fall. But these same witnesses would have been able to testify that he was alone on the end of the jetty at the time.

"But the principal point of the dodge was to enable the criminal to establish an alibi. If Stanlake had been shot by some hand other than his own, that hand must have been present in Brenthithe at the time. That was the obvious argument. Anyone who could prove absence from the scene

must be deemed to be not guilty. But now that we have fathomed the dodge we know that it was only necessary for the criminal to have been in Brenthithe at about half-past ten on Monday evening, when the wires of the tide-gauge were cut."

"The *Fulmar* did not sail until about one o'clock on Tuesday morning," Arnold remarked significantly.

"Carrying with her the one man who had an adequate reason for murdering Stanlake. I don't know that any motive for murder can really be adequate, but Leyland's was at least more understandable than that of any individual who had a mere impersonal dislike of the harbour master's schemes.

"The actual course of events seems pretty clear. Mrs. Leyland, who seems to be a rather light-hearted sort of person, found her husband's company irksome and decided to seek amusement elsewhere. You must remember that the *Fulmar* spends more of her time out of port than in, so she had plenty of opportunity. Frimley took her to the King's Head and there she struck up an acquaintance with Stanlake. How and where that acquaintance ripened we don't know. To begin with, she probably met Stanlake in the evenings at some rendezvous in the New Town. Perhaps Stanlake didn't spend so much time over his tide-gauge in that workshop behind the harbour office as people imagine. It doesn't matter. The point is that he eventually persuaded Mrs. Leyland to meet him in his rooms. Here she was seen twice, first by Bickton and then by Rogers. Neither of whom, unfortunately, can give evidence of identification.

"How Leyland became aware of these visits we can only conjecture. His wife was playing a very dangerous game, there's no doubt about that. To reach Stanlake's rooms she had to cross the harbour. Whether she used the chain ferry or old Neddy's boat she ran a great risk of being seen and recognised. Stanlake wouldn't have dared to take her over in his own launch when there was anyone about, for that would have given the game away at once. Just to fill in the gap for the moment we may suppose that someone saw her on one of these occasions and reported the matter to her husband next time the *Fulmar* came in.

"Leyland no doubt interpreted this news in his own way. He probably regarded Stanlake as the seducer of his wife, of whom apparently he was profoundly jealous. Mrs. Frimley gave you to understand that he kept her in as complete subjection as he could. He argued that if Stanlake were out of the way further temptation would be removed from Mrs. Leyland's path.

From all we hear this argument would not appear to be very sound. Failing Stanlake, Mrs. Leyland was the sort of woman who would very soon have found someone else.

"Her husband, whoever, didn't realise that. Or he may have thought that Stanlake's violent death would serve as a salutary shock to her morals. In any case, he decided to murder Stanlake in such a way as would ensure complete safety to himself. He brooded over this until he had evolved his scheme. And a very ingenious and almost perfect scheme it proved."

Arnold's practical common sense prompted him to the obvious question. "How did he get hold of the pistol?" he asked.

"That, I'm bound to confess, is where my imagination fails me," Merrion replied. "He may have become aware of the existence of the pistol and where it was kept on the occasion of one of his visits to Stanlake's rooms, soon after the Harbour Master was first appointed here. He may have remembered it when he found himself in need of a weapon. He may have seized an opportunity of entering the rooms and taking it. But somehow this theory doesn't sound altogether satisfying. He must have had the pistol in his possession some little time before the event. And I can't understand how it was that Stanlake failed to notice that it had disappeared."

Arnold shook his head. "It isn't good enough," he said. "No jury would be content with mere possibilities where a capital charge was involved. Before we make any charge against Leyland we've got to prove definitely how the pistol came into his possession."

"I quite realise that," Merrion replied. "At present I'm only trying to indicate the lines upon which I think you should work. We'll avoid that particular difficulty for a moment and pass on to the next step. Having secured the pistol, how and where did Leyland prepare the ammunition?"

"He hadn't got the necessary tools at his house, that I can assure you."

"That I'm quite prepared to believe. But have you ever had the chance of looking round the engine-room of a steamer? The engine-room staff must be prepared to carry out at least minor repairs to the machinery, and they are equipped with a variety of tools for that purpose. It is by no means unusual for a small lathe to be included among these tools. And, of course, all the engine-room equipment is in charge of the chief engineer.

"Leyland then had every appliance for making his ammunition, ready to his hand in his own engine-room. He would be sure to have copper rod from

which to form his bullet, and brass from which he could turn out his cartridge case.

"Now we come to another rather nice point. Having made his cartridge, Leyland had to secure some sort of propellant with which to load it. He was a careful sort of man and was taking no unnecessary risks. He wasn't going to a gunsmith to buy a few sporting cartridges, for instance. The purchase might have been remembered and if so, would have led to his being suspected.

"You remember what Whitford told us about the propellant? In his opinion it was a sort of black powder, more like the stuff used in rockets than anything else. As you probably know, all ships carry rockets for use as distress signals. Leyland, no doubt, got hold of one of the *Fulmar's* stock, unloaded it, and used the powder for his cartridge. Where the bulletted breech cap came from, I don't pretend to guess. They are sold everywhere by the hundred and Leyland would have run no risk in buying as many as he wanted. Not in Brenthithe, of course, where he was known, but in some port reached by the *Fulmar* in the course of one of her voyages. Similarly, the purchase of saltpetre for the preparation of the twine would arouse no suspicion whatever.

"I think we can follow Leyland's movements on Monday evening almost step by step. Your conversation with Mrs. Frimley enables us to do that. Leyland went on board the *Fulmar* early in the afternoon, no doubt to put the finishing touches to his preparations. He was on board when Captain and Mrs. Frimley reached the ship somewhere between eight and nine o'clock. No doubt he kept his eye on them and saw them go into the King's Head, when he knew that the coast was clear.

"His next step was to discover an imaginary defect in the condenser outfall, which could only be got at from outside the ship. This necessitated the launching of a boat. I haven't seen the *Fulmar* but I'm willing to bet that she's fitted up like all these small coasters. She probably carries a couple of small life-boats in davits and another still smaller boat, lashed on the after hatch. This boat is quite light, hardly heavier than a dinghy, and it's the simplest thing in the world to drop it in the water with a derrick and a steam-winch.

"I want you to imagine what conditions were like on board the *Fulmar* on Monday evening. One is apt to imagine a ship with an officer and a helmsman on the bridge, and folk running about all over her deck. But when a cargo vessel is in port, with her hatch covers on and only waiting for the

tide to get under way, things aren't like that at all. All hands, officers and men, are down below snatching a few hours sleep while they can, and only a single watchman is posted to keep an eye of some sort on the gangway. And very often the watchman's sleeping the soundest of the lot.

"That's very much how matters stood on board the *Fulmar* about ten o'clock on Monday evening. No doubt Leyland got the watchman to help put the boat in the water. The supposed trouble with the condenser out-fall was the pretext for this. Then when the watchman had gone back to the gangway on the other side of the ship, Leyland rowed quietly across the harbour to that iron ladder at the end of the jetty. He tied his boat up there, set his man-trap, cut the wires of the tide-gauge and then went back to the *Fulmar*. By the time the Frimleys came out of the King's Head he was industriously tinkering with the condenser out-fall. Three hours or so later the *Fulmar* sailed. And Leyland doesn't know yet that at the very time he was making his preparations to kill Stanlake his wife was leaving Brenthithe for good. His satisfaction at the success of his crime will be marred, I'm afraid, by the reflection that it hasn't done him the slightest good."

"How are you going to prove all this?" Arnold demanded.

Merrion shrugged his shoulders. "I'm extremely thankful to say that it's your job, not mine, to prove it. If Leyland denies all knowledge of the affair, I don't see how you can possibly bring it home to him. It'll probably end as one of those cases where the police know perfectly well who did the job, but haven't enough proof to bring him before a jury."

"The Yard's hardly big enough as it is to hold the records of such cases. But I've got to make some attempt to get the necessary evidence. And I rather think the first step is to get on the track of the elusive Mrs. Leyland."

CHAPTER XIV

THE "FULMAR" RETURNS

ARNOLD and Merrion returned to the New Town, where the former immediately commenced his inquiries. He called a second time on Mrs. Frimley, who was able to provide him with valuable material in the shape of a photograph of Mrs. Leyland taken just after her marriage. In addition to this, Mrs. Frimley provided him with a description of her friend and of the clothes she was wearing on Monday evening. From Seaview Terrace Arnold went to the railway station where once again fortune favoured him. The senior ticket collector happened to know Mrs. Leyland by sight, since he lived in the same road and had often seen her going in and out of her house. He remembered seeing her at the station on Monday evening before the departure of the last up train. He had punched her ticket and was pretty certain that it was a third single to London.

Armed with this information, Arnold rejoined Merrion at the Lord Rodney. "Of course it doesn't follow that Mrs. Leyland is still in London," he said, "but I'm going up there all the same by this evening's train."

Merrion nodded. "I think you're wise," he replied, "but don't forget that the *Fulmar* is due back here on Tuesday morning's tide."

"I shall be back here by then all right, don't you worry. Do you happen to know what time high water is on Tuesday?"

"I'm not a walking tide-table but I can give you a rough estimate. It was high water here at 1.47 a.m. summer time last Tuesday. It should therefore be high water next Tuesday about a quarter to eight. If you come down by the train that Whitford took the other day you will arrive about the same time as the *Fulmar*."

"That's running it rather too fine. I'd like to be waiting on the quay when she comes in."

"What's the good of that? You're hardly likely to be in a position to arrest Leyland by then. And he'll only be forewarned if he sees you hanging about. Much better give him time to go home and find out that his wife has

bolted. Your chance to have a chat with him will be when he's properly rattled by that discovery."

"I'll think about it," said Arnold. "Are you coming back to London with me this evening?"

"No, I shall stay here. If there's going to be any fun I don't want to miss it. But you may be sure that I shall meet the *Fulmar* on Tuesday morning whether you're back here or not."

On the morning after Arnold's departure Merrion strolled down to the Topsail Schooner, timing himself to arrive shortly before twelve o'clock, when the house opened. It was a fine Sunday morning and the New Town was thronged with visitors. But the neighbourhood of the Topsail Schooner was deserted, save for half a dozen thirsty-looking individuals lounging about and watching the door expectantly. Merrion recognised Neddy the ferryman among these and strolled towards him.

Arnold and Merrion had crossed the harbour so often that by this time Neddy knew them both by sight. He touched his cap as he saw Merrion approaching. "Are you wanting to be put across, sir?" he asked.

"Not just now, thanks," Merrion replied. "To tell you the truth I came down here in the hopes of getting a drink."

"The Schooner will be open in a few minutes now, sir," said Neddy comfortingly. "I'm just waiting for a glass myself."

"Then we'll go in and have one together. You live somewhere close handy, don't you?"

Neddy jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "Just across the road there, sir," he replied, "but don't tell that to everybody. They might come and knock me up after I've turned in."

"And then you'd have to get up and take them over the ferry, I suppose?"

Neddy winked slyly. "Some of them tries it on as it is, sir," he replied, "but I've learnt a thing or two in my time. I just take a peep from behind the curtain to see who it is, and if I think they're good for a dollar maybe I'll come down; but mostly I stays where I am and let them hammer until they're fed up with it."

"You wouldn't mind turning out for the harbour officials or anyone like that, I suppose?" Merrion remarked casually.

"It all depends who they was," replied Neddy darkly. "There's some I might be willing to oblige, but there's others I wouldn't turn out for, no, not if they was to offer me half a quid. Eight o'clock in the morning till ten at night is the hours I work. And if the Archbishop of Canterbury was to call me up at half-past ten he'd be disappointed."

"The Harbour Master is a person of more importance locally than the archbishop, I dare say."

Neddy removed his pipe from his mouth and spat with energy and determination. "It all depends who he might be," he replied. "If Captain Robinson had come along at midnight I'd have got up and put him over. But for him that was buried on Friday, I wouldn't have stirred a finger. And he knew that, for I'd shown him so already."

"How did that happen?" Merrion asked.

"Well, I'll tell you, sir. Somewhat about last March it must have been. I turned in and was just going off to sleep when I heard a terrible rumpus. Someone hammering on the door and shouting my name. I didn't need to get out of bed and see who it was, for you couldn't mistake that voice once you'd heard it. That's His Nibs, I said to myself, and he can blinking well hammer until he's worn the skin off his knuckles for all I care."

"Well, he gave it up after a time, and then I peeped out to see what he'd do. It was close upon midnight and the last ferry chain had gone. And the joke of it was that he'd got his own launch, but she was tied up on the other side of the harbour by the fish market steps."

"Did you see how he'd got across in the end?"

"You may be sure I did. And many a chuckle I've had since at the job he had. First of all he got into my boat and untied her. Then he started looking for the oars, but naturally he couldn't find them. When I finish for the day I take my oars home with me. Somebody would be sure to come along and pinch them else. So His Nibs had to take up one of the bottom boards and paddle himself across with that. Then he had to get his own launch to start and tow my boat back from where he'd found her. Lastly he had to take the launch across and tie her up again. I reckon it took him half an hour or more before he was through with it. I wondered what he had been doing in the New Town so late at the time, but I've found out since."

"He must have had some business there, I suppose," Merrion remarked casually.

"Don't you believe it, sir," Neddy replied confidentially. "He was courting a married woman, that's what he was doing."

"The devil he was!" Merrion exclaimed. "Did you know the lady?"

"Not then, I didn't. I didn't know what he'd been up to, see? But some weeks later, I saw for myself. The latter end of April it must have been."

"What did you see then?"

"Something that would have surprised you, sir. It was a fine night and I'd turned in as usual when about a quarter before midnight I heard a motor-boat start up. 'Hallo, what's this?' I thought, so I got up and peeped out. And then I saw that it was the Harbour Master's launch coming across. It tied up at my steps and a couple got out of it. A man and a woman they were, and I recognised the man as Captain Stanlake. But who the woman was I couldn't see, not until they came straight across the road here. And then, while I was still looking through the curtain, mind, the Captain lifted her off her feet and kissed her, as bold as brass as you might say. As she threw her head back I saw her face clear enough in the light of the street lamp. And then I remembered that I'd seen her before, crossing the ferry sometimes in the evening."

"You didn't know her name, though?" Merrion suggested.

"Not then, I didn't. But as it happened, a day or two later she came down here one evening. About eight o'clock it was. I'd got two or three in the boat and was just going to cross when she stepped in. Naturally I didn't let on that I'd seen her before. But Nobby, one of the harbour men, was in the boat with me, and when I'd put her ashore on the other side, I called him back. 'Half a minute, Nobby,' I said, 'I want a word with you. Who was that lady in the boat just now?' And Nobby said, 'Why, you must have seen her afore,' he said. 'She's Mrs. Leyland, the wife of him that's chief in the *Fulmar*.

"'Oh, that's who it is,' I said. 'And what's she doing by the water at this time, seeing that the *Fulmar* won't be in again until the day after to-morrow at the earliest?'

"'How should I know what she's doing,' Nobby says. 'It's no affair of mine, or of yours either that I can see. Likely enough she's going to the King's Head to meet Mrs. Sneyd. I saw her and the Captain go in there half an hour ago. The *Merganser* sails on to-morrow morning's tide.'

"'Oh, so that's your little game, is it?' I thought. 'I'll just keep an eye on you, my lady, and see what you're really up to.' So I went and stood in the

fish market, leaning against the railings, and keeping my weather eye open. At first I thought that Nobby must be right, for Mrs. Leyland walked straight to the King's Head, and I saw her go in by the saloon entrance. But it wasn't many minutes before she slipped out at the other door and away she went up High Street. And then I knew that I hadn't been mistaken and she was going to visit Captain Stanlake. And I thinks to myself that would be something to make His Nibs sit up if I was to say anything about it."

"It would probably have done more harm to the lady than to Captain Stanlake," Merrion remarked.

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth that's just how it struck me, when I'd time to think it over. I hadn't any grudge against her, but I had against the Captain. He'd treated me bad ever since he came here and he'd told me that he wouldn't let me keep the ferry if he could help it. It wasn't for some time that I thought how I could get at the Captain without hurting the lady overmuch."

"How did you propose to do that?" Merrion asked.

"Well, it wasn't everybody that would have thought of it," said Neddy proudly. "I put it to myself this way, see? Mrs. Leyland would rather have the Captain's company than her own husband's, that's clear enough. Well, if that's the case she shall have him. I'll work matters so that Mr. Leyland will divorce her and bring the Captain's name in. And then we'll see what Mr. Pottern and those fine gentlemen on the Harbour Commission say to their Harbour Master being brought up in the courts like that. They'll sack him for certain, or my name's not Edward Knapp."

"Wonderful!" Merrion murmured. "And how did you set about it?"

"Well, sir, I'll tell you. I sat down and wrote a letter, though putting pen to paper isn't much in my line. I set down what I'd seen and where Mrs. Leyland spent her evenings when the *Fulmar* was at sea. But I didn't set my name to the letter, you may be sure of that. I wasn't going to be drawn into any bother."

"When did you write this letter?"

"Nearly three weeks or a month ago. I don't properly remember the date, but it was the day before the *Fulmar* was expected in the time before last. I folded the letter up and put it in an envelope, and when the *Fulmar* came alongside I walked up to the gangway and called out to one of her chaps. 'Here's a letter for Mr. Leyland,' I said. 'A young chap gave it to me yesterday evening as he was crossing the ferry, and asked me to see that he

got it'; and later in the day Mr. Leyland came along and asked me about the young chap who'd given me the letter. I told him that I didn't know anything about him but that I'd seen him in the company of Captain Stanlake. And after that Mr. Leyland didn't ask any more questions. But you may be sure that he'd have started that divorce if the Captain had lived. And by that same token, it's thirsty work sitting out here in the sun."

The door of the Topsail Schooner had been opened some minutes earlier and Merrion immediately took the hint. Neddy's story was worth as many pints as he cared to consume. The identity of the mysterious lady was now established beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Rather to Merrion's surprise, that Sunday afternoon passed off without any further manifestations of ill-feeling between the Old Town and the New. Major Metfield was probably responsible for this. He had, with unexpected strategy, concentrated his forces in the fishermen's quarters. Here they were ready either to repel an attack upon the inmates, or to prevent them organising a raid into hostile territory.

When Merrion strolled down the Parade after breakfast on Monday morning, he saw a small coasting steamer lying alongside the wharf. Wondering whether this could be the *Fulmar* somehow returning a day before her time, he turned back to the Lord Rodney and sought the advice of the landlord. But a single glance at the vessel satisfied Mr. Ogston's experienced eyes.

"No, that's not the *Fulmar*," he said. "That's the *Merganser*. She sailed two or three days earlier than the *Fulmar* and now she's back first. They're very much alike at a distance, but it's easy enough to tell them apart when you know. The *Fulmar's* got a taller funnel and she's got a couple of sampson-posts aft, which the *Merganser* hasn't."

Later in the morning, however, Merrion strolled down to the harbour to satisfy his curiosity. He timed himself to arrive when he knew the King's Head would be open, on the chance of finding some of the *Merganser's* people there. When he entered the lounge he found a single customer chatting affably with the landlord.

It did not take Merrion long to become a third party to the conversation. The customer's name, he learnt, was Mr. Hobart, and he was chief engineer of the *Merganser*, which had berthed at half-past six that morning. Captain Sneyd had gone home long ago, but, as Mr. Hobart put it, "I haven't got a missus to expect me to go running round her skirts as soon as the ship's in

port. I'd as soon stay here and have a drop of whisky before I go on to the house where I lodge."

"I've known a good many chief engineers in my time," said Merrion, "but you're the first I've known, to be a bachelor."

Mr. Hobart laughed. "You'd have met a pair of them if you'd been here a couple of years back," he replied. "Leyland of the *Fulmar* wasn't married then. And between the three of us he'd have been a lot better off if he'd stopped as he was. I can't understand how a capable chap like Leyland let himself be caught like that. Not that I've anything against Mrs. Leyland, for the little I've seen of her, but she's not the sort of woman who would suit Leyland for long, you may be sure of that."

The conversation drifted inevitably to the subject of Stanlake's death. The *Merganser* had been in Glasgow when the news appeared in the papers, and Mr. Hobart seemed well-informed upon the subject.

"It's a proper mystery," he said, "but there won't be many in Brenthithe to regret his death. I shouldn't wonder if there are folk in the New Town who could tell tales if they cared to. The papers said that there was a Scotland Yard chap down here on the job. Has he found out anything about it, yet?"

"If he has he's kept it to himself so far," Merrion replied diplomatically.

After another round or two of drinks, Mr. Hobart said that he would have to go back to the *Merganser* and fetch his bag. Merrion offered to accompany him and was invited on board.

By natural instinct the two men gravitated to the engine-room, Mr. Hobart's domain, of which he was inordinately proud.

Merrion duly admired the gleaming metal and fresh-washed paint. "Well, everything here's all shipshape and Bristol fashion!" he exclaimed. "I'll wager the *Fulmar's* engine-room isn't kept as you keep this."

"It may not be so well kept, but it's better equipped," said Hobart enviously. "I'd rather be shipmates with my old man than with Captain Frimley any day. But Frimley's got a pull with the owners, that's why they gave him a command so young. And he's only got to ask for anything and they'll give it to him, while my old man has to nag and nag and then he doesn't get it. Why, you'd hardly believe it, but last year the owners let Leyland have a brand new set of condenser tubes, just because he said the old ones were corroded. Corroded, my foot! Besides it was his fault if they were, as I told him. And just about the same time I asked for a new lagging

for my cylinders and they wouldn't let me have it. Why, to see the *Fulmar's* engine-room you'd think you were in a repair ship. Leyland's got a drilling machine and a lathe and heaven knows what all down there, and just for the trouble of getting Captain Frimley to ask the owners for them. It's not right, for they'd rap me over the knuckles if I so much as asked for a set of box spanners. And the result is that if anything goes wrong Leyland can put it right in a few minutes, where it would take me and my chaps half a day if we were lucky. The *Fulmar* will be in to-morrow, they say, and I'll ask Leyland to show you his outfit since you're interested."

Meanwhile Arnold had put the machinery of Scotland Yard into action, with conspicuous success. Mrs. Leyland's attempts to conceal her identity had been limited to discarding her wedding ring and returning to her maiden name of Charlton. Under this name she had sought temporary shelter in a Bloomsbury boarding-house, where she had been well known before her marriage. It was, therefore not a very difficult matter for the police to trace her. On Monday afternoon Arnold called at the boarding-house in question, asked for Miss Charlton, and was received by a young and undeniably pretty woman. Her expression betrayed her apprehensions as to what this visit might mean. Arnold lost no time in enlightening her.

"I have called in connection with the sudden death of Captain Stanlake," he announced.

The Inspector had assumed, since the case had been fully reported in the London papers, that Mrs. Leyland would have been aware of what had happened. But, to his astonishment, he saw that he had taken her utterly by surprise.

"Captain Stanlake's death!" she exclaimed incredulously. "I don't believe it. When did it happen?"

"Almost exactly twenty-four hours after you left Brenthithe, Mrs. Leyland."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, utterly taken aback by this sudden use of her married name. "You've been following me, then. But you won't be able to persuade me to go back to that brute of a husband of mine, whatever you say."

"I should not dream of trying to influence you one way or the other. My concern is purely with the death of Captain Stanlake."

"But I don't know anything about that?" she protested. "You said yourself that it happened after I left Brenthithe."

"I don't suppose that you know anything about Captain Stanlake's death, Mrs. Leyland, but you were acquainted with him during his lifetime, I believe?"

She flared up at this. "What if I was? I'm free to make what friends I like, whatever my husband may say."

"Was your husband aware of your friendship with Captain Stanlake?"

"I don't see what that's got to do with you or with anyone else," she replied sharply. "And even if I should happen to have known Captain Stanlake, I don't see why you should come round here to pester me like this."

"I'll tell you, Mrs. Leyland," said Arnold quietly. "Our inquiries prove that you knew him better than anyone else in Brenthithe."

The shot told, as he had hoped it would. "What do you mean?" she demanded with sudden anxiety.

"I think you know well enough what I mean," Arnold replied significantly. "When did your husband discover how you spent your evenings when he was at sea?"

For a few moments she stared at him in horror, and then her expression relaxed. "I wonder how you found out," she retorted. "Bob couldn't have told you, and that queer servant of his, Bickton, wouldn't have dared say a word. It must have been that brute Rogers that Bob kicked out one evening. I hoped he didn't know who I was. But it may interest you to know that neither Bob nor I meant our little romance to develop into anything more permanent. I've had one taste of marriage, and that'll last me for the rest of my life."

"I'm afraid that's hardly the point, Mrs. Leyland," said Arnold coldly. "You haven't yet answered my question as to when your husband learnt of this little romance, as you call it."

She shrugged her shoulders. "So far as I know he hadn't heard anything of it when I last saw him. He'd have been sure to have made a fool of himself if he had. He's got a vile temper, and, as I told Bob once, he'd have half murdered me if he'd found out what was going on. I couldn't put up with his temper any longer, and that's why I left him."

"What did Captain Stanlake say when you told him of this?"

"He laughed and told me that he thought that I was pretty well able to take care of myself. But just to make sure he gave me a pistol and told me to

threaten my husband with that if he started any nonsense."

"What sort of a pistol was it?"

"Oh, a clumsy old thing that he'd picked up abroad somewhere. Bob told me that it was perfectly safe because it wasn't loaded and it was so out of date that nobody could possibly get any ammunition for it. But, as he said, my husband wasn't to know that, and it would do to keep him off as well as anything else."

"When did Captain Stanlake give you this pistol?"

"Oh, about a month or five weeks ago. He told me to keep it out of sight somewhere where my husband wouldn't be likely to find it. So I put it in my chest of drawers among my clothing."

"Where is the pistol now, Mrs. Leyland?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know," she replied carelessly. "Lying about somewhere in that house in Brenthithe, I suppose. My husband's welcome to it if he can find it. I'm not likely to want it any more."

"You say you put this pistol in your chest of drawers when Captain Stanlake first gave it to you? Wasn't it still there when you left home last week?"

"If it was, I didn't see it. But then I didn't look very far. I was in a hurry to pack my things and get away before anyone interrupted me. As it was, Carrie Frimley nearly made me miss my train. And anyhow I shouldn't have brought that silly old pistol away with me."

"Do you remember when you last saw the pistol?" Arnold persisted.

"Oh, I really couldn't tell you. I put it in the bottom of one of the drawers the evening it was given to me and scarcely gave it another thought."

"Could your husband have found it, by any chance?"

"I suppose he could, if he'd rummaged through my things. But if he had he'd have wanted to know all about it. He's one of those men who always like to poke his nose into their wives' affairs."

Arnold left it at that. He realised that he could not call Mrs. Leyland to give evidence against her husband and that the less he said to her the better.

He left the boarding-house and returned to Scotland Yard, where he found a reply to a message he had sent to the Goole Police earlier in the day.

The *Fulmar* had left that port on Sunday morning's tide with her usual complement, including Mr. Leyland, the Chief Engineer.

There seemed nothing further to detain him in London and he left for Brenthithe by the next train, arriving there just before eight o'clock on Tuesday morning. As he stepped on to the platform he found Merrion waiting for him.

"I thought you'd be certain to come by this train," the latter said. "You're in plenty of time, as it happens. I've been on the top of Bollard Head with a pair of field-glasses since six o'clock and the *Fulmar* wasn't in sight when I left there ten minutes ago. I don't think she can possibly catch this tide now."

"What's happened to her?" Arnold asked irritably. "She left Goole on Sunday morning, I know that."

"I don't suppose that anything very serious has happened to her," Merrion replied. "She probably ran into a patch of fog somewhere, in the Humber or at the mouth of the Channel maybe. That would delay her, and Captain Frimley, realising that he would miss this morning's tide here, would naturally slow down to save coal. Once he'd missed this tide there would be no point in his arriving off the mouth of the harbour much before six o'clock this evening. I've got the car here and we'll run on to the top of Bollard Head again for a last look-see. Then, if there's still no sign of the *Fulmar* we'll go back to the Lord Rodney and have breakfast."

As Merrion had expected the *Fulmar* had not yet hove in sight. During breakfast he and Arnold exchanged notes on their adventures since they had last met.

"It all seems pretty conclusive," said Merrion, when they had finished. "Neddy's anonymous letter must have given Leyland a bit of a shock. I expect his first impulse was to go home and beat up his wife, but he very soon thought better of that. He made up his mind to lie low until he had got Stanlake out of the way and then to deal with the lady in his own fashion. No doubt he waited until she had gone out, then hunted round for compromising evidence. He expected to find letters or something like that, instead of which he came upon the pistol. It's just possible that he had seen the pistol in Stanlake's rooms and recognised it. In any case, it would not be difficult for him to guess where it came from. The fact that Stanlake gave the pistol to Mrs. Leyland fills up the gap in my theory, anyhow."

"It was Bickton who suggested that Stanlake must have taken the pistol from the boxroom himself," Arnold remarked.

"Yes, I know. And when Leyland saw the pistol he realised that if he used it as his weapon to kill Stanlake, it would inevitably suggest suicide. And I honestly believe that, but for that unconsumed bit of twine, he would have got away with it. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to apply for a warrant," Arnold replied firmly. "I saw my chief yesterday evening, and he agrees with me that there's ample evidence to justify an arrest. As soon as the *Fulmar* comes in Leyland will be taken into custody. Then we'll search his confounded engine-room and see what we can find."

Merrion shook his head. "I'm willing to bet that you won't find anything that'll do you any good," he said. "Leyland's much too cunning to have left incriminating evidence lying around. That's the great advantage of a ship, it's so easy to dispose of anything you have no further use for by throwing it overboard. But I quite agree that it will be a good plan to arrest Leyland, if only to pacify the distracted factions in this town."

Arnold went off to see the Chief Constable, to whom he explained the situation. Major Metfield, at first incredulous, eventually came round to his opinion and promised his co-operation. Armed with this the Inspector rejoined Merrion to await the arrival of the *Fulmar*.

At Merrion's suggestion, they co-opted Mr. Ogston, and the three of them took up their position on the summit of Bollard Head. It was a fine day with a light breeze blowing, but a heat haze limited visibility to about three or four miles. Within this range the fishermen were busy lining for whiting and pollock.

The vigil of Arnold and his party was a long one, for it was not until four o'clock that Merrion, looking through his field-glasses, picked up a dark smudge on the haze-hidden horizon.

"That's a vessel of sorts!" he exclaimed. "And she's bound this way by the look of it. If so, we'll be able to make her out in a few minutes."

The smudge rapidly became perceptible to the naked eye and revolved itself into the shape of a steamer heading towards Brenthithe. Merrion handed his binoculars to Mr. Ogston. "See what you can make of her," he said.

Mr. Ogston studied the approaching vessel for a minute or so in silence. "She's the *Fulmar* all right," he reported at last. "You can't mistake that tall funnel of hers and the sampson-posts."

"Then we'd better get down to the wharf to meet her," said Arnold.

Merrion took the glasses again. “There’s no hurry,” he replied. “She’s pretty well down to her marks, by the look of her. I looked up this evening’s high water and it isn’t till 8.10. When do you reckon there will be enough water over the bar for her, Mr. Ogston?”

“Not much before half-past six,” Ogston replied. “And Captain Frimley’s not a man to run risks. If he brings her alongside much before seven o’clock I shall be surprised.”

“Not until seven o’clock!” Arnold exclaimed. “What will he do between then and now?”

“With the weather like it is, he will let go over yonder under the other shore where there’s a good anchorage,” Ogston replied. “Otherwise, he’d stand on and off. If you wait here for a few minutes longer you’ll see for yourself what he decides to do.”

The *Fulmar* continued on her course until she was barely a mile from where they stood watching her. Then she began to lose way.

“I thought so!” Ogston exclaimed. “Now, you watch.”

The *Fulmar* slowly came to a standstill, and as she did so a splash of white foam shot up from her bows. A few seconds later the sound of the splash reached them, followed by the unmistakable rattling of a chain cable. Her anchor down, the *Fulmar* gradually swung round until she lay with her stern towards the entrance of the harbour.

The deliberateness of these proceedings seemed to get on Arnold’s nerves. “It’s no good stopping up here staring at the ship, like a lot of trippers,” he said irritably. “You and I had better get down to the wharf, Merrion. We can drop Mr. Ogston at the Lord Rodney on the way.”

Merrion nodded. His car was parked nearby and in this he carried out the Inspector’s programme. They reached the wharf soon after half-past four, to find Timble, who had been put at Arnold’s service, awaiting them.

Arnold’s impatience was evinced by his refusal to move from the waterside. “You can’t tell within a few minutes when she’ll come in,” he said. “This confounded tide may upset your calculations by rising faster than you expect.”

The *Fulmar*, being anchored round a bend of the coast, was invisible to them from the wharf. As they paced restlessly up and down, fresh fears assailed the Inspector. “I suppose that damned ship is still where we last saw her?” he exclaimed suddenly.

Merrion laughed. “Frimley won’t run away with her,” he replied. “He and his crew are all too anxious to get home for that. You may observe, by the way, that Mrs. Frimley isn’t down here yet to meet her husband. She knows, even if you don’t, that there’s plenty of time.”

By six o’clock, however, Arnold’s patience had reached its limit. “While we’re kicking our heels here, that fellow may make a bolt for it,” he exclaimed. “How do I know that he’s still on board the *Fulmar* at this very moment?”

“He’d find it a good long swim to reach the shore from where she’s lying,” said Merrion calmly.

“Swim, my aunt! The *Fulmar* carries boats, doesn’t she? And what about all these confounded fishermen messing round out there? He could get ashore fast enough if he wanted to.”

“You may set your mind at rest about that,” Merrion replied. “Why should he want to get ashore? He hasn’t the slightest idea that he’s under suspicion, and since the *Fulmar* doesn’t carry wireless nobody can have warned him that his liberty is in danger. You’ll find him aboard all right when the *Fulmar* comes alongside.”

“It’s all very well for you to talk. If he slips through my fingers now I’ll never forgive myself. If there was any chance of getting out to the ship I’d take it.”

“Well, there is. You haven’t forgotten the Harbour Master’s launch, have you? There she is, just over there, tied up by the fish market steps.”

“Why the devil didn’t you think of that before?” Arnold exclaimed irritably. “Hold on a minute, though. Who’s going to run the launch for us?”

“Failing anyone else, I fancy I can manage her myself. But let’s ask Timble’s advice.”

Timble, upon the matter being explained to him, produced a suggestion at once. “There’s Clarke, the chap they call Nobby, working over there, sir,” he said. “He’s one of the harbour men and understands the launch. I’ll go and tell him what you want, sir.”

A few minutes later Arnold, Merrion and Timble were seated in the Harbour Master’s launch which, under Nobby’s guidance, was speeding out of the harbour. They rounded the point to find the *Fulmar* still lying at anchor, rolling lazily in an almost imperceptible swell.

The officer on anchor watch, seeing the launch approaching, had a Jacob's ladder dropped over the side. Up this the three of them climbed, Arnold not without some difficulty and muttered profanities.

The officer helped them over the rail. Timble was the only one of the three he recognised and to him he turned for information. "What's the meaning of this boarding party?" he asked.

"This gentleman is Inspector Arnold from Scotland Yard, sir," Timble replied.

"Eh!" exclaimed the officer. "We don't often entertain distinguished company like that on board this ship. What's your business with us, Inspector?"

"I want to speak to Captain Frimley," Arnold replied shortly.

"He was in the saloon finishing his tea a few minutes ago. Ah, there's the steward. He'll look after you. Steward, these gentlemen want to see the Captain. Take them into the saloon, will you?"

They followed the steward into the tiny but scrupulously clean saloon. At the head of the table sat Captain Frimley, an empty tea-cup before him. Merrion caught sight of a .22 miniature rifle secured by a lashing standing in the corner beside him.

Arnold introduced himself. "I'm from Scotland Yard, Captain," he said. "Is your Chief Engineer, Mr. Leyland, on board?"

"He was in here having his tea a few minutes ago," Captain Frimley replied. "So you're the Inspector from Scotland Yard I read about in the papers when we were at Goole? Poor old Stanlake! I'm afraid we parted bad friends on the night when I left Brenthithe. Have you found out yet how it happened?"

"I fancy we're on the right track," said Arnold. "Where is Mr. Leyland now?"

"You'll find him down in the engine-room, I expect. You gentlemen might have saved yourselves the trouble of coming out, for I'm going to get under way in a few minutes, and I shall be alongside in half an hour."

Arnold was about to leave the saloon, but Merrion put out his hand to stop him. "Excuse my curiosity, Captain," he said, "but I should like to know what that miniature rifle is for?"

"Oh, I've carried that for along time now," Frimley replied. "When I've got nothing better to do I chuck a bottle overboard and pot at it. It's more difficult than you might think, especially if there's any sea running."

"You've plenty of ammunition for it on board, I suppose?"

"There ought to be a couple of boxes of bulletted breech caps in that locker over there. But I'm sorry I haven't got time for a shooting match just now. I must be getting on to the bridge. I'll pass a line to your fellow on the launch and give him a tow in!" And with that Captain Frimley left the saloon, having no intention of allowing the operations of the police to interfere with his duties.

Arnold, utterly out of his element on board the *Fulmar*, was inclined to be more irritable than ever. "Damn it, he might have at least shown us the way to the engine-room!" he exclaimed. "I've got to find that chap. . . ."

Merrion interrupted him. "I'll show you," he said. "I ought to be able to find my way about a ship by this time. Come along."

As they reached the engine-room grating a whiff of hot oil greeted them. Arnold peered down into the depths to which led an apparently endless iron ladder. "Have we got to go down there?" he asked.

"We have," Merrion replied. "You'll find it all right when you get there. I'll show you the way."

He put his foot on the top rung of the ladder, and as he did so a bell clanged below him. "That's the stand-by," he said. "Look sharp."

He ran swiftly down the ladder, followed more circumspectly by Arnold and Timble. When he reached the bottom he found two engineers eyeing him with manifest disapproval. The chief, whom Merrion recognised as such by the braid on his sleeves, took a step forward. "Who the hell are you and what do you want?" he demanded truculently.

Merrion made no reply but waited until Arnold had come up beside him. "This is the Chief Engineer of the *Fulmar*," he said gravely.

Arnold stepped forward, facing his man. "Is your name Leyland?" he asked.

"It is," the other replied. "And perhaps you'll explain what you mean by coming into my engine-room without being asked."

"I hold a warrant for your arrest on a charge of the wilful murder of Captain Stanlake," the Inspector replied sternly.

Leyland staggered, and the colour faded from his face. But he quickly recovered himself. “That’s nonsense, of course,” he said with strained deliberation. “We’ll talk about it when we get alongside. At the moment, I’m expecting orders from the bridge.”

Before Arnold could reply, the bell clanged again, and the pointer of the telegraph jerked to Slow Ahead. The second engineer, who was at the levers, acknowledged the order, then let steam into the cylinders.

At the sound of the bell, Leyland had turned his back on the Inspector, and now stood watching the machinery in breathless expectancy. The steam sighed like a lost soul, and the massive cranks began very slowly to revolve. Leyland waited until the low-pressure piston was at the top of its stroke. Then, with a wild yell of defiance, he dived head first into the crank-pit.

Merrion shouted to the second to stop her, but it was too late. Relentlessly the low-pressure piston-rod descended.

In a marine engine the clearance between a big-end and the bottom of its crank-pit is only a few inches.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Death at Low Tide* by Miles Burton]