

"He may have missed the connection at Selby," Fox suggested. "In that case he would motor."

Beamish spoke authoritatively.

"I wish, Benson, you would go and ring up the Central and see if there has been any message."

Willis whispered to the sergeant, who, beckoning to two of his men, crept hurriedly down the port ladder to the lower deck. In a moment Benson followed down the starboard or lighted side. Willis, listening breathlessly above, heard what he was expecting—a sudden scuffle, a muffled cry, a faint click, and then silence. He peeped through the porthole. Fox was expounding his theory about the railway connections, and none of those within had heard the sounds. Presently the sergeant returned with his men.

"Trussed him up to the davit pole," he breathed in the inspector's ear. "*He won't give no trouble.*"

Willis nodded contentedly. That was one out of the way out of six, and he had fourteen on his side.

Meanwhile the men in the cabin continued anxiously discussing their leader's absence, until after a few minutes Beamish swore irritably.

"Curse that fool Benson," he growled. "What the blazes is keeping him all this time? I had better go and hurry him up. If they've got hold of Archer, it's time we were out of this."

Willis's hand closed on the sergeant's arm.

"Same thing again, but with three men," he whispered.

The four had hardly disappeared down the port ladder, when Beamish left his cabin and began to descend the starboard. Willis felt that the crisis was upon him. He whispered to the remaining constables, who closed in round the cabin door, then grasped his revolver, and stood tense.

Suddenly a wild commotion arose on the lower deck. There was a warning shout from Beamish, instantly muffled, the tramp of feet, a pistol shot, and sounds of a violent struggle.