

You loved your last book...but what  
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, **Love**reading will help you find new  
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

---

**Opening Extract from...**

# **Western Approaches**

Written by Graham Hurley

Published by Orion Books

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to **Love**reading.  
Please print off and read at your leisure.

---

# WESTERN APPROACHES

*Graham Hurley*



First published in Great Britain in 2012 by Orion Books,  
an imprint of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd  
Orion House, 5 Upper Saint Martin's Lane  
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette Livre UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Graham Hurley 2012

The moral right of Graham Hurley to be identified as the  
author of this work has been asserted in accordance with  
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted  
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the  
prior permission of both the copyright owner  
and the above publisher of this book.

All the characters in this book are fictitious,  
and any resemblance to actual persons  
living or dead is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library.

ISBN (Hardback) 978 1 4091 3152 6  
ISBN (Export Trade Paperback) 978 1 4091 3153 3

Typeset by Deltatype Ltd, Birkenhead, Merseyside

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers  
that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from  
wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing  
processes are expected to conform to the environmental  
regulations of the country of origin.

The sea has never been friendly to man. At most it has been the accomplice to human restlessness.

Joseph Conrad

## Prelude

*He awakes, as usual, at 03.55. For a second or two he lies in the clammy darkness, trying to work out what's gone wrong.*

*The last couple of days a thick tongue of high pressure has pushed up from the Azores, exciting weather forecasters all over northern Europe. He's listened to the headlines on the short-wave radio: 32°C in Amsterdam; hotter still in Paris; 35° expected this afternoon in London.*

*Christ, he thinks. London.*

*He searches for the T-shirt he carefully folded two hours earlier, checks with his fingers that it's not inside out. His mouth tastes of the tin of sardines they'd shared last night and he knows that his breath stinks. Sardines on Ryvita. Again.*

*He runs his tongue along his teeth and tries to pinch the darkness from his eyes. Something's definitely wrong. He knows it is. But, still groggy, he can't quite fathom what.*

*He pulls on the T-shirt. The last week or so, before the high pressure arrived, the weather and the ocean have been brutal. Sheer concentration has kept exhaustion at bay, but now, in the eerie calm, he feels totally wiped out. Yesterday he spent hour after hour checking their progress on the GPS, a habit – in Kate's phrase – that has become a nervous tic. But he can't help it. Without the suck and gurgle of a following sea, no matter how hard they pull, they seem to be going nowhere. He's sure of nothing except the heat of the day, a thick blanket that presses down on them, bringing everything to a halt: conversation, energy, belief, even the small comfort of a*

*decent horizon. The ocean, poster blue, shimmers in the heat. Everything has become a blur. And now, as dawn breaks, this.*

*He struggles into his shorts, wincing with the effort. He has a couple of boils on his arse, incredibly painful. He checks them with a mirror when Kate's not watching. She's squeezed them dry as best she can and made him start on the antibiotics against the infection but he can feel, or he thinks he can feel, another one coming.*

*He's on his side now, up on one elbow, waiting for his arse to settle down. He can feel tangles of hair hanging round his shoulders and his head nudges against the roughness of the cabin roof. Ten days ago, riding out yet another storm, he'd popped a bottle of cooking oil in this khazi of a cave and everything still feels sticky to the touch. They lost a jar of coffee too, same storm, and the granules are everywhere. They melt in the sweat from his body and he's yet to emerge from the cabin without the telltale smears of brown all over his face. Kate, who seems immune from Nescafé Gold, has taken to calling him Coco the Clown. He thinks she means it as a joke but there are moments, especially recently, when he's not altogether sure.*

*The alarm on his wristwatch begins to ping. Four o'clock. He's learned to hate this sound with a fierce passion, the way some people react to the whine of a nearby mosquito. It means he has to move, gather himself together, face another day.*

*His fingers find the stainless-steel latches that keep the hatch in place. At last, thicko, he's realised what's wrong. The boat isn't moving. He can't hear the regular splash-splash of the oars, can't sense the faint tug as the boat inches forward. He feels nothing but the gentle sway of the ocean.*

*Anxious now, he fights to open the hatch. He knows how much Kate loves the slow drama of sunrise, that hour or so when the huge orange ball eases itself free of the ocean. Yesterday, she told him, was the best ever. Today, just maybe, might be better still.*

*Kate is keeping a record of everything. As the last latch comes free he can picture her squatting midships, her face to the rising sun, steadying her Nikon for yet another shot.*

*Daylight floods the chaos of the tiny cabin. He blinks at the familiar tableau of boat, of lashed-down gear, of sea, of the rich yellow spill of the new day. He wriggles his upper body through the hatch and rubs his eyes again, looking round, trying to find his wife.*

*But Kate has gone.*

This, at least, was the way he explained it in the first of several interviews with Devon and Cornwall CID.

# *One*

SUNDAY, 10 APRIL 2011

Nearly a year later, D/S Jimmy Suttle stumbled downstairs, knotting his tie, his mobile wedged against his ear. In theory, this was a precious weekend off. In theory, he should still be in bed.

‘Where did you say?’

‘Exmouth Quays. Sus death. Mr Nandy wants to blitz it. Asap, Jimmy. Do I hear a yes?’

The line went dead, leaving Suttle in the chaos of the tiny kitchen. In these situations, D/I Carole Houghton seldom bothered with anything but the barest of facts. That way she was already on to the next call.

Suttle gazed around. The tap he’d promised to fix this very morning was still dripping onto the pile of unwashed plates. Two empty bottles of cheap red and the remains of yet another Chinese takeaway were stuffed into the lidless waste bin. Even the cat, a tormented stray Lizzie had rescued from down the lane, wasn’t interested in the curls of battered fish in gloopy sauce.

Suttle found it next door in the sitting room, crouched behind the sofa. Here, the carpet stank of animal piss and a fainter smell that signalled a more general neglect. In one of her blacker moods Lizzie had christened the cat Dexter in memory of a nightmare boyfriend at her long-ago Pompey comp. Now, his back to the wall, Dexter would do anything



to defend his patch against all-comers. Suttle, wondering why he hadn't swallowed more ibuprofen last night, knew exactly how he felt.

Upstairs, he could hear Grace talking to the mobile over her cot. This, he knew, was a prelude to the full lung-busting wail with which she greeted every new day. Normally it would be Lizzie who got up and answered the summons, leaving Suttle with a few snatched extra minutes in bed. Last night, switching off the light, he'd promised to sort out his daughter himself, giving Lizzie a lie-in. Now, looking for his leather jacket, he was trying to remember whether the car had enough fuel to get him to Exmouth.

Grace began to howl. Pulling on his jacket, Suttle headed for the door.

Exmouth, an old-fashioned low-rise seaside resort with a reputation for kite surfing, birdwatching and lively Friday nights, lies nine miles south of Exeter. Exmouth Quays is a marina development built around the basin of the old commercial docks, a quieter frieze of expensive waterside homes in various shades of New England pastel. Suttle, who'd been here before, had always regarded it as a film set, not quite real, a showcase destination for people who wanted to make a certain kind of statement about themselves.

He parked the Impreza beside Houghton's Vauxhall estate. Her dog, a mongrel terrier, lay curled on the back seat. A couple of uniforms had already taped off an area of walkway beneath the biggest of the apartment blocks, a towering confection with a faux clapboard finish and stainless steel trim.

Suttle crossed the bridge that spanned the dock entrance, flashed his ID at the uniforms and ducked under the tape. The apartment block was called Regatta Court. A banner draped across the fourth floor warned that only three apartments remained for sale while an accompanying poster asked WHY LIVE ANYWHERE ELSE? Why indeed, thought Suttle, eyeing

the body at the feet of the grey-clad Crime Scene Investigator.

He'd worked with the CSI on a job in Torquay only last month. Difficult guy. Ex-marine. Mad about R & B. Lost his left leg after stepping on an IED in Afghan.

'Houghton about?'

The CSI was making notes on a clipboard. Suttle was trying to remember his name.

'It's Mark, if you were wondering.' The CSI didn't look up. 'And she's talking to Mr Nandy.'

Suttle was still studying the body sprawled among the puddles on the wet paving stones.

'So what happened?'

'He has to have fallen.' The CSI glanced up at last. 'We're thinking the top apartment. Big fuck-off place. Number 37.'

'The guy's got a name?'

'Kinsey. According to a neighbour.'

'Anything else you want to share?'

The CSI gave him a look. Wet weather made his stump ache.

'Some arsehole's been spewing round the corner if you want to take a look.' He nodded at the sea wall at the end of the walkway. 'Apart from that? No.'

Suttle was circling the body, examining it from every angle. The guy was on the small side. He was wearing a pair of Nike track pants and a red singlet. A crest on the singlet featured a pair of crossed oars. His feet were bare and there was something awkward in the way the body seemed to change angle around the neck. Blood from both ears had pooled on the paving stones and more blood had matted in his thinning hair. Guessing his age wasn't easy but Suttle thought around forty. His eyes were open, the lightest blue, and the last seconds of his life had left him with an expression of faint surprise.

Suttle knelt to examine the big Rotary on Kinsey's left wrist. The impact had smashed the face of the watch. Four minutes past three. Suttle's eyes strayed to the name beneath the crest on the singlet: *Jake K.*

‘Has Mr Nandy asked for the pathologist?’

‘Here, you mean?’

‘Yeah.’

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘He thinks there’s no point. And he’s probably right. A fall from that kind of height you’re talking head first. If there’s anything else, it’ll show up at the PM.’

‘You think he jumped?’

‘I’ve no idea.’

Suttle nodded. His early years as a uniformed probationer in Pompey had taught him everything he ever wanted to know about the way the weight of the human head can turn a jumper upside down. Twice he’d had to deal with deranged adolescents who’d turned their backs on the world, or on a fucked-up relationship, and stepped off the top level of the city’s Tricorn car park. Fall dynamics was a phrase he’d never grown to like.

He turned to the CSI again.

‘CCTV?’

‘There isn’t any. The nearest cameras are in the town centre. We’re talking nearly a mile away.’

‘None at all?’ Suttle was amazed.

‘Zero. *Nada*.’

‘Right.’ He nodded. ‘So how’s Mr Nandy?’

‘Manic. Argyle lost again yesterday and he thinks they’re stuffed.’

Suttle turned to go. CID-wide, Det-Supt Malcolm Nandy was recognised as the king of lost causes. Trying to defend his empire against the marauding cost-cutters at force HQ was one of them. Plymouth Argyle was another. His beloved Pilgrims were on the edge of bankruptcy, and among the Major Crime Team Nandy was rumoured to be binging them the odd fiver, doing his bit to help them stave off oblivion.

Fat chance on both counts, Suttle thought, ducking under the tape again.

\*

Lizzie knelt beside the fireplace in a third attempt to coax a flame from the pile of damp kindling. Grace stood in her playpen by the sofa, shaking the wooden bars in a bid to attract the cat's attention. Her morning bottle and a modest bowl of porridge had at last put a smile on her tiny face.

'Daddy?' she gurgled.

'He's at work, my love.'

'Daddy gone?'

'I'm afraid so.'

Lizzie abandoned the fire. Even the balls of newsprint beneath the kindling, the leftovers from last week's local paper, seemed reluctant to light. She pulled one out and flattened it against the cracked slates on the hearth, wondering if she'd missed anything. PENSIONER'S HANDBAG LEFT ON BUS went the headline. Breaking news in Colaton Raleigh, she thought. *What the fuck have I done?*

She was still taunted by dreams of her last day at work and the get-together in the pub afterwards. Starting her maternity leave in Portsmouth, she'd had every intention of one day resuming her job at the *Pompey News*. As the favoured feature writer, she'd cornered the market for the plum interviews and the occasional foray into serious investigative journalism, and she'd loved every minute of it. She'd scooped one of the big provincial awards for a feature on racial tensions among the city's Kosovan community and there'd been a couple of flattering calls from one of the national tabloids, inviting her to send a CV and a representative sample of her recent work. But then came Grace, and nine months later Jimmy had managed to score a promotion of his own. By this time she'd begun to know a different Pompey composed of fat mums at the health centre, ever-partying student drunks down the road and a manic neighbour – heavily tattooed – who claimed to have once met the Pope

She remembered the morning the letter from Exeter had

arrived only too well. That night she and Jimmy had celebrated with champagne and blueberries with lashings of double cream. It had never been part of her career plan to move to Devon, and she'd never realised that her husband had fallen out of love with Portsmouth, but seeing the grin on his face as they emptied the second bottle she realised that she and Grace had no choice. Jimmy had grown up in the country, a straggly little village on the edge of the New Forest, and now he couldn't wait to introduce her to what he called the sanity of rural life.

Chantry Cottage had been his idea. His new employers – Devon and Cornwall Constabulary – had wanted him to start rather earlier than he'd expected, and he'd headed west without taking the extended leave he'd promised her. The Major Crime Investigation Team he was joining put him through a two-week force induction programme which gave him a little spare time at the end of each working afternoon. Within days, a trawl of the Exeter estate agencies had produced half a dozen potential buys. All of them, in Lizzie's view, were way too expensive. Property prices in Pompey were beginning to sink and mortgage companies were starting to demand ever bigger deposits country-wide. Jimmy was disappointed – she could hear it in his voice – but a week later she was looking at yet another set of estate agent's particulars. Chantry Cottage, according to Jimmy, nestled in a fold of the Otter Valley. It had half an acre of garden, mature fruit trees and space for a garage. The estate agent was the first to admit the property needed a little work. Hence the giveaway price of £179,000.

*Needed a little work.* Lizzie understood language, made a living from it, knew the multitude of blemishes a well turned phrase could hide. *Needed a little work?*

She lifted Grace from the playpen and wandered through to the kitchen to put the kettle on. She'd first seen the property back in high summer last year. It was a beautiful August day with real heat in the sun, and driving down the Otter Valley from the quaintly named Newton Poppleford even she had to

admit that this little corner of England was hard to resist. The way the greenness of the valley cupped the water meadows beside the river. The silhouette of a lone buzzard circling high over a waving field of corn. The lumbering herd of cattle that brought them to a halt a couple of minutes later. Grace had kicked her little feet with excitement. She'd never seen cows before.

The cottage lay about a mile outside the village. According to the estate agent, it had once been a chapel, but on first glance Lizzie thought this highly unlikely. Grey slate roof. Red brick construction. Ugly metal-framed windows. The broken gutters were brimming with moss and there were water stains down the exterior walls. The estate agent's photo had been taken from the back of the house, the view artfully framed by shrubs and a fruit tree. On this evidence, and her husband's obvious enthusiasm, Lizzie had been expecting something that would grace a calendar. Instead, she found herself looking at a run-down property that might have belonged on one of the more distressed Pompey estates.

Inside, it got worse. The moment you stepped inside, the sunshine vanished. The place smelled of damp and something slightly acrid that she couldn't place, and there was a chill thickness to the gloom that made her physically shiver. You went in through the kitchen. The units, obviously home-made, were chocked up on wooden blocks. One door had lost a hinge and a couple of drawers were missing. Ancient loops of electrical wiring hung from the walls and the walls themselves were wet to the touch.

Next door, in the tiny living room, the floorboards moved underfoot beneath the scuzzy carpet. One of the windows didn't close properly and there were gouge marks in the metal frame where someone had tried to get in. The open fireplace looked promising but on closer examination Lizzie found neat piles of mouse droppings on the cracked stone hearth. When Jimmy – still wrestling with the window – finally managed to

get the thing open the draught down the chimney carried a thin drizzle of oily soot.

Under-impressed, Lizzie had tried to get her thoughts in order, tried to puncture the bubble her husband had made for himself, but he was already leading her through the chaos of the garden towards the tiny stream at the bottom, his daughter in his arms, fantasising about the life that awaited them in this new home of theirs. Walks on the common up the road. A cat or two for company. And evenings around the barbecue he'd install on the refurbished patio, toasting their good fortune in cheap red from the village store.

In the end, that evening, she'd said yes, not really understanding his passion for this horrible house but knowing how much it mattered to him. He'd already negotiated a £15K discount on the asking price, which brought the place within their budget, but the work she insisted had to be done right now would be down to Jimmy. No problem, he said. His dad was handy. He'd get him across from Hampshire the moment they exchanged contracts. Between them, they'd sort the electrics, install a new kitchen, do something about the bathroom, give everything a lick of paint and generally clean the place up. He might even be able to tap his dad up for a loan to cover new windows. By the time Lizzie and Grace were ready to move out of Pompey, the place would be unrecognisable.

None of it had happened. Jimmy's dad fell off his moped and ended up in hospital the day contracts were exchanged. Jimmy himself had made a start on a couple of the jobs, but the pace of life on Major Crimes was unforgiving, and by the time Lizzie had sold their little terraced house it was nearly November. Stepping into Chantry Cottage, she recognised the smell and the damp only too well, realising why Jimmy had been so keen to keep her away. His apology had taken the form of a huge bunch of lilies, beautifully wrapped, which he'd propped up in the cracked sink in the kitchen. It was a sweet

gesture, and she'd done her best to smile, but she'd hated lilies ever since.

Now, with Grace still in her arms, her mobile began to ring. She went back into the living room and deposited Grace in her playpen before stepping outside to take the call. Mobile reception in the valley was patchy at best. Another nightmare.

'Lou? It's me. How are you?'

Lizzie closed her eyes, glad – at least – that the rain had finally stopped. The only person who called her Lou was Gill Reynolds. The last thing she needed just now was an hour on the phone with an ex-newsroom colleague eager to tell her what she was missing.

'I'm fine. Busy. You know ...' Lizzie tailed off. As ever, Gill had no interest in listening.

'Great news, Lou. The buggers have given me a couple of days off. You remember that promise I made to pop down?'

Lizzie tried to fend her off, tried somehow to wedge herself into the conversation, tried to explain that this wasn't the best time to make a flying visit, but in her heart she knew it was hopeless. Gill would be down on Tuesday, around teatime. Directions weren't a problem because she'd just blagged a new TomTom off the paper. They had loads to catch up on and room in her bag for something nice to kick the evening off. Stolly or something else? Lizzie's call.

Lizzie opted for Stolly. Under the circumstances, she thought, vodka and oblivion might be an attractive option. Gill was still giggling at a joke she'd just made about some guy she was shagging when she rang off.

Lizzie watched the rain returning down the valley. Over the winter life seemed to have physically penned her into this godforsaken place. She'd become someone else. She knew she had. Through the open door she could hear Grace beginning to wail. For a moment she didn't move. A fine drizzle had curtailed the view. She lifted her face to the greyness of the sky and closed her eyes again, knowing she should have thought



harder about trusting her husband's judgement. Underfoot, she could feel the paving stones shifting with her weight. That was another thing he'd never done. The bloody patio.

Jimmy Suttle found Nandy and Houghton in the apartment that served as the Regatta Court sales office. Houghton stood by the window, staring out, her phone pressed to her ear. Nandy occupied a seat at the desk, eyeballing an attractive middle-aged woman who evidently looked after the development. Her name was Ellie. She'd just put a call through to a local firm she used for work around the apartment block. They'd have someone down in ten.

Nandy glanced up, seeing Suttle at the door. He did the introductions.

'Ellie's whistled up a locksmith,' he said. 'We're talking number 37. Fifth floor. You OK with a flash intel search? Mark needs to meet this locksmith guy before he sorts the door for us.'

Suttle nodded. As ever, Nandy was moving at the speed of light. Thirty years in the Major Crimes game had taught him the investigative importance of the first twenty-four hours of any enquiry. Pile all your pieces on the board, give the shaker a good rattle and pray for a double six.

'So what have we got, sir?' Suttle asked. 'What do we know about this guy?'

Nandy threw the question to Ellie. Suttle sensed she was enjoying the attention.

'You mean Jake Kinsey?' she said.

'Yes.'

'He's been with us ...' she frowned '... a couple of years now? Nice enough man. Lived alone. Kept himself to himself.'

'What did he do for a living?'

'I'm not quite sure. I think he may have been an engineer at some point. He was never one for conversation but we once had a fascinating little chat about alternative energy sources.'

Some of the residents were wanting to install solar panels and he told me why they'd never work on our kind of scale. Then we got on to wind turbines. He knew a lot about them too.'

Nandy glanced at his watch. He was sharp as a tack but famously impatient.

'Is there anything special about number 37?' Suttle again.

'Yes. It's the biggest apartment in the block. It's huge. I like to think of it as the jewel in our little crown.'

'How much?' Nandy this time.

'Space?'

'Money. How much did he pay for it?'

Ellie paused. The bluntness of the question seemed to trouble her. She looked briefly at Suttle, one eyebrow raised, then returned to Nandy.

'One point four five million.' She smiled. 'As I recall.'

'A rich man, then?'

'Not hard up, obviously.'

'You checked him out at the time? When you agreed terms?'

'Of course we did. Not personally. But yes.'

'Did he raise a mortgage? Some kind of loan?'

'I can't remember.'

'Can you check? I'd be grateful.'

Ellie nodded and reached for a pad to scribble herself a note. Nandy had got to his feet and was feeling for his watch again. A lean man in his early fifties, he wore the same grey suit regardless of the season and in situations like these reminded Suttle of Samuel Beckett. Recently Lizzie had taken to reading *Krapp's Last Tape* in bed, and Suttle had clocked the author photo on the back. Nandy had the same hollowed-out face, the same shock of iron-grey hair, the same unforgiving eyes. This was a guy who brought an unyielding sense of mission to every enquiry, every exchange. Suttle rather liked him. There was madness in those eyes. Stuff had to happen quick-time and Nandy was there to make sure it bloody well did.

Houghton was off the phone. Nandy wanted to know whether she'd secured a slot for the post-mortem.

'Tomorrow morning,' she said. 'Half nine.'

'Best they can do?'

'Yes.'

'Pathetic.'

'I agree.'

Nandy headed for the door. He was off up to the local nick to commandeer a couple of offices where his team could camp out. The enquiry already had a name: Operation *Constantine*.

Houghton and Suttle paused a moment, then followed him out of the door. Nandy was halfway across the car park, heading for his Volvo. Houghton and Suttle exchanged glances. Houghton was a big woman with rimless glasses and a blaze of frizzy silver-blond hair. She had huge hands, a live-in partner called Jules and spent a great deal of her spare time riding horses on the eastern edges of Dartmoor.

'I'll field the locksmith and liaise with Mark,' she said. 'I'll bell you when we're ready for the flash intel.'

'And me?'

'Talk to Ellie.' She nodded back towards the office. 'She likes you.'

Suttle did her bidding. He'd worked for D/I Carole Houghton for more than six months now and had developed a healthy respect. The steadiness of her gaze told you a great deal. This was someone you'd be foolish to underestimate.

Ellie offered him coffee. The kitchenette was next door. It wouldn't take a second.

Suttle shook his head. He wanted to know more about Jake Kinsey. And about what he might have been up to last night.

'That's easy.' Ellie was smiling. 'He was in the pub.'

'Which pub?'

'The Beach. It's just across the way.'

'How do you know?'

'Because we were there too. My partner and I.'

Kinsey, it turned out, had been in the middle of some kind of celebration. Saturday night the pub had been packed. Kinsey had turned up around eight with a smallish bunch of guys in tow. Ellie hadn't recognised any of them but there had to be some kind of tie-up with the local rowing club because they were all in badged training gear, and Kinsey had made a big play of the silver cup he was carrying. Ellie was vague on the details but thought they must have been taking part in some competition or other and had won.

'He bought champagne over the bar,' she said, 'and that doesn't happen often in the Beach.'

Kinsey and his mates had stayed for maybe an hour. They'd all had a fair bit to drink.

'What happened then?'

'They left. Like you do.'

'Where did they go? Do you know?'

'Not really, but my guess would be home, Kinsey's place. There was talk of phoning for a takeaway. I suppose Kinsey lived the closest so that's where they went.' She looked at the phone. 'There's a Mr Smart who lives in one of the flats below. Nothing gets past him. Do you want me to give him a ring?'

Suttle shook his head, making a note of the name. Organising the house-to-house calls would fall to D/I Houghton. He'd pass the intel on.

'This rowing of Kinsey's. How does that work?'

'You get in a boat. It has oars.' Ellie was flirting now. Suttle knew it. He was thinking of the badge on Kinsey's singlet, the crossed blades.

'Yeah ... sure ... so is there a club?'

'Of course there's a club. I just told you. ERC. Exmouth Rowing Club. Pride of the town. There's someone else you ought to talk to. She's the club secretary. Her name's Doyle, Molly Doyle.'

'You've got a number?'

‘I’m afraid not. Look on the website.’ The smile again. ‘Nice woman. Fun. Everyone calls her the Viking.’

Houghton kept her laptop in the back of her estate car. Still waiting for the locksmith, Suttle borrowed the keys, woke the dog up and made himself comfortable in the front passenger seat. It was raining again, harder than ever, and the CSI had draped Kinsey’s body with a square of blue plastic sheeting before taking cover in the Scenes of Crime van.

Suttle fired up the laptop and googled ‘Exmouth Rowing Club’. The website was impressive. The home page had an eye-catching banner featuring a crew of young rowers powering a boat towards some imagined line. This giant collective effort made for a great picture. Their mouths open, their backs straight, their faces contorted, these kids were exploring the thin red line between pain and glory, and Suttle lingered on the image for a moment, wondering how an experience like that might have triggered the celebration in the pub.

From the front of Houghton’s car, he had line of sight to the scene of crime across the entry to the dock. The warmth of his body had misted the windows but he wiped a clear panel with his fingertip, gazing across at the hummock of blue sheeting, trying to imagine the sequence of events that had linked several bottles of champagne to this inglorious death four or five hours later. Was the guy a depressive? Had he got so pissed he’d done something stupid and gravity-defying and just toppled off his own balcony? Or was the story more complex than that?

A keystroke took Suttle onto the contacts page. Molly Doyle’s number was listed under ‘Club Secretary’. He made a note and was fumbling for his mobile when Houghton appeared beside the passenger door.

Suttle wound down the window. The locksmith had arrived.

It was still barely nine o’clock by the time Lizzie got Grace washed and changed. Despite the weather, she knew she had