

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No. 4

persuaded the superintendent there to lend it to me, and came on to Ridsen with it."

A Promising Bite!

"IT was certainly an idea, sir," approved Tommy, "but the mongrel's hardly in the bloodhound class, is it?"

"Hardly," said Hawke, "though it has some of the attributes of most classes. Anyhow, I brought it to Ridsen, and the first thing that happened as we were leaving Ridsen station was that it tried to bite the ticket-collector."

"And what did the ticket-collector say?"

"He said: 'Lumme! That blessed tripehound again.'"

Tommy grinned, and nodded appreciatively.

"Ha! A useful bite that!"

"I questioned the man, and he vaguely recalled the three people I described, though he chiefly remembered the dog, which had tried to remove a piece of his trouser-leg."

"Well, it was a start. What happened then?"

"I decided to let the animal go its own way, and it led me on a tiresome jaunt half round the town. Then it went into that public-house over there."

"It trotted right across the bar, and went through closely-drawn curtains covering a doorway at the far end of the bar."

"I was about to follow it when the barman stopped me, remarking that the inner room was private. I said nothing to him about the dog, and it was apparent that he had not noticed it. I was in there for about ten minutes, expecting that the dog would be chased out, but it wasn't."

"I then watched the place from outside," went on Hawke, "and, presently, the dog was brought out by a man who had it on a lead. No, he wasn't Vesey. He was a small, slim man. I

followed him for a short distance, and then stopped him and said that the dog looked like one that had been lost by an acquaintance of mine."

Tommy nodded eagerly.

"What did he say to that?"

"He claimed that it was his own, but he seemed uneasy all the time he was talking to me, and was mighty glad to get away. Of course, it may only have been a case of common theft on his part, but— Look!"

Hawke gripped Tommy's arm, and, looking through the open doorway of the tavern, the youth could see a man of slight build talking to the barman. There was a dog by his side, and the man was gesticulating—pointing to the animal and to the curtains at the far end of the room, and then jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

"That's the fellow I was speaking about. It looks as though he's inquiring who came in with the dog," remarked Hawke.

"Then it looks as though he's in the business," remarked Tommy.

"If he is," answered Hawke, "I imagine that he has already got in touch with Vesey, who may have sent him back to the pub to find out how the dog got there. He will naturally have concluded by now that the dog has been the means of putting the police on his track."

Tommy "Steps On It."

A FEW minutes later the small man came out of the Spread Eagle and hurried down a lane by the side of it, carrying the dog under his arm. At the far end of the lane, which did not admit vehicular traffic, was a road.

Hawke slipped out of the car.

"Mustn't lose sight of him," he said. "Find a way round to that road and pick me up there."

The turns proved to be tricky, and Tommy had to back out of a blind road before he finally found the way.

The Boomerang Bomb

When he reached the other road he found Hawke waiting anxiously.

"What's delayed you?" he snapped, jumping in by Tommy's side. "Head towards the main London road. A fellow who looked like Vesey joined the small man, and they got a saloon car out of that little lock-up garage. They're moving out—and going like the very dickens."

"Sorry, guv'nor; not my fault," apologised Tommy. "Watch me step on it now, though!"

The Bentley left Ridsen at a speed which left the townsfolk staring, and when he was out on the main road Tommy increased speed until the tyre treads were giving out a high-pitched, screaming note.

The speedometer had passed the eighty mark for a second when Hawke touched Tommy's arm.

"That's their bus. That blue saloon right ahead."

"It's travelling all right," answered Tommy, "but there's no chance of its getting away from us."

He eased up for a moment, but the blue saloon put on such pace that he had to accelerate again to keep it in sight.

"Get up a little closer," urged Hawke. "I fancy they've been testing us to see whether we're on their track, and they're likely to dodge away off the main road."

Which course the fugitives adopted about five miles farther along; and, as soon as the saloon disappeared from view around a concealed turning, Tommy stepped heavily on the accelerator again.

The turning proved to be a narrow lane with overhanging hedgerows, and its tortuous character kept the other car from view for several minutes. Then, on topping the brow of a hill, Tommy suddenly applied the brakes and uttered a surprised exclamation.

At the foot of the hill ran a stream, spanned by a somewhat decrepit stone bridge. The saloon car had stopped on the farther side of this, and was drawn in to the side of the narrow road which

wound away up over another rise beyond.

Tommy glanced at his employer, and it was evident that both had become acutely mindful of the desperate character of the people they were chasing.

"Well, what is it, sir?" asked Tommy, drawing the Bentley almost to a standstill. "A showdown?"

"A breakdown, perhaps. I wonder if they've taken to the fields. No. Look, there's someone sitting at the wheel."

He suddenly sat upright and gripped Tommy's arm, and, following the direction of his intent gaze, the youth saw the other man scrambling up the bank on the other side of the stream, and clambering over the parapet of the bridge as though in a desperate hurry.

He was running at full speed towards the saloon when Tommy accelerated once more.

"Stop!" exclaimed Hawke, and the Bentley pulled up with a screech of brakes.

Tommy understood the significance of the order as soon as it was uttered.

"The bridge!" he gasped. "I suppose he's put an explosive under it. We shall lose 'em if we don't get across, guv'nor. We'd better risk it."

When Murder Misfired.

THE youth had scarcely finished speaking when he found himself being bundled bodily out of the car.

"Out you go," growled Hawke, taking charge of the wheel. "The risk is all mine."

The Bentley was more than three hundred yards from the bridge when, after depositing Tommy in the road, Hawke sent it shooting forward.

His chance lay in the fact of their having made extraordinarily good time in reaching the turning. The fugitives had only had a narrow margin of time in which to act, and they had to allow a sufficient number of seconds to ensure their own safety.