

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No. 4

The powerful car bounced crazily over the uneven road, and almost tipped into the hedge before roaring away on the last fifty-yard stretch.

The explosion seemed to take place when the Bentley was actually in the middle of the bridge, but such was its speed that its precise position remained a matter of uncertainty.

Its effect on Hawke approximated to the shock of a nearby flash of lightning, and the earth seemed to rock so as to tip the vehicle on to its nearside wheels.

At the same time there was a loud bang, and the air became clouded with flying objects, ranging from nuts and bolts to portions of concrete posts and granite blocks, which had constituted the fabric of the bridge.

There was a rattling and drumming on the car, and the sound of shattering glass as the windscreen split into pieces.

Hawke received a dazing blow on the head and stinging cuts on the cheek and hands as flying fragments struck him.

By some miracle he kept the car on the road and sent it whipping away up the hill.

The experience made him momentarily callous, so that he was indifferent to such a minor matter as a collision.

At the top of the hill he caught up with the saloon, swerved, and jammed the smaller car against a low stone wall, buckling in its side and knocking the driver senseless.

The detective pitched half over the broken windscreen, recovered, and then jumped out of the car, prepared to engage in a struggle, for which, however, there was no need.

The driver was unconscious, and his passenger, who proved to be Vesey, was dazed from a blow on the side of the head.

The dog, which was barking excitedly in the back of the saloon, appeared to have had yet another lucky escape from injury.

By the time Tommy arrived on the scene, having waded across the shallow stream, a villager had fetched a local police constable, to whom Hawke quickly explained matters.

The head of the organisation for which Vesey, his wife and Pollitt had been working was arrested the following day by officers of the Special Branch at Scotland Yard, and Vesey then told the story of the Marsdale business.

"I'd seen what was going on between my wife and Pollitt," he said, "and we were just about due for a bust-up. Anyway, to get on with the story. The three of us were sent to do that Rawson job, and after we'd reconnoitred I went to telephone to the boss to make sure there was no last-minute cancellation.

"I'd left my wife and Pollitt waiting by that empty house when I went to telephone, and when I entered the grounds of Rawson's house I was surprised to find Pollitt coming out, followed, a few yards in the rear, by the dog.

"'It's all clear,' Pollitt whispered. 'I've just had a final look round.'

"I then went round to the back and got in that basement window and placed the bomb where it would be most effective. Whilst I was doing so I heard an explosion nearby. I rushed out, and, when I saw what had happened, I beat it for the station.

"It dawned on me then that the dog had been carrying something in its mouth when it was following Pollitt out of the grounds, and I was able to recall that that something was oblong and brown. It was, in fact, one of our little high-explosive packets, though, being intent on the job in hand, I hadn't connected it with that at the time.

"You see the little plot which Pollitt and my wife had hatched? Pollitt had set that time-bomb at the last minute when he saw me approaching, and slipped it into the basement.

"It was calculated to go off when I was there, thus killing two birds with one stone.

"But Pollitt hadn't noticed that the dog was on hand. I always thought that animal had a bit of the retriever in him."