

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No. 3

Bolton had been, The Bat had broken into the house. His methods were marked by none of that caution and care which characterised those of the other rogue; he did not even wear gloves. And he had failed to make the expected haul. Evidently Lord Veldon was a wise man, and all valuables of a portable nature had been moved, probably to a safe deposit.

Thief After Thief.

RAGING with fury, The Bat had searched one room after another. It was in vain; there was absolutely nothing of value that he could carry away. It was one more added to his list of failures.

Another oath came from his lips as he looked after the retreating form of the constable. For a moment he was half-tempted to try another of the big houses, but his courage failed him. There had been little risk entering No. 21, but it would be very different elsewhere; burglar-alarms, house-dogs—a dozen different dangers would await him.

"Better get 'ome," he muttered as he crept through the gateway. "I ain't in luck to-night, and I——"

With a quick movement he drew back against the railings. His keen, cat-like eyes had detected a shadowy form emerging from another gateway—the form of a man who moved with the stealthy steps of one who had reason to avoid observation.

"Lumme! Looks like a bloke on my game!" The Bat muttered under his breath.

His rubber-soled shoes making no sound, he followed in the wake of the misty form ahead. Avoiding the main thoroughfares, the man he was dogging crept through side turnings and alleys, and, hardly knowing why he did so, The Bat trailed in his wake.

"Ain't no doubt about it," he reflected. "Whoever 'e is, 'e was on the same lay as me."

It was a long trail, always leading east, until it came to a dingy, poverty-stricken district in Limehouse, where The Bat was thoroughly at home. The man he was following turned through a dark lane leading towards the river, and paused before a dilapidated building known as Dadson's Wharf. There came the hollow slam of a door, and he disappeared.

"Blimey, it's a queer sort o' joint to 'ang out," The Bat muttered. "Wonder what sort of swag 'e got."

Still muttering to himself he turned and slouched away to the dingy tenement he called home.

The Hide-Out.

THE public first learned of the death of Peter Mordaunt from the early editions of the evening newspapers published next day. Later editions contained more detailed reports, stating that the residences of Lord Richard Veldon and Peter Mordaunt had both been broken into the previous night. The generally accepted theory was that the thief had first entered No. 21 Crayleigh Gardens, and, securing nothing of value, had afterwards broken into No. 17. At the latter house he had evidently been disturbed by the unfortunate millionaire, whom he had killed with a blow on the head. The murderer—so the paper stated—had secured about £300 in notes and jewels worth many thousands.

Seated alone in a room overhanging the river at Limehouse, a man read the reports by the light of a smoky oil lamp. In appearance he was a man well over sixty years of age, raggedly clad, with long, straggling grey hair and beard. It was a clever disguise, and Bolton had used it for more than a month.

In that district the cracksman was known by the name of Tom Hopkins, and was regarded as a harmless old fellow who picked up a scanty living by selling logs. The owner of Dadson's Wharf, moved by the old man's pitiful

story of poverty, had allowed him to make a temporary home there. The only furniture was a rickety table and a stool; some ragged sacking on the floor did duty for a carpet. The room was reached by a rickety staircase, and the part of the building where it was situated jutted out some distance over the river.

"Queer about that other job," Bolton muttered to himself. "There must 'ave been some other cove out on the same game as I was last night in Crayleigh Gardens. Good thing for 'im 'e didn't pick the same crib as me. I don't 'old with partnerships in my game. Work on yer own and keep the swag to yerself, that's my motto."

He chuckled to himself as he thought of the valuable haul hidden beneath the loose floorboard. For a couple of hours he sat smoking, then he rose and began to remove his disguise.

"Bit early yet," he murmured when it was done, and he resumed his seat. "Just as well to wait till after midnight. I'll take the sparklers to Nat Honstein, and I reckon the old twister will pay a decent price for 'em. If 'e don't——"

The Visitor.

JAKE BOLTON raised his head, then moved to the door and peered down the rickety staircase.

"Thought I 'eard something," he muttered. "Daresay it was the rats."

He went back to his seat, picked up the newspaper, and read the report through again.

"No need for me to bother," he muttered. "They ain't got no clues. One of the best jobs I've ever done, and I reckon it'll be worth——"

This time Bolton was certain he heard something; but before he could rise a stooping, shabbily-clad man appeared in the doorway, and the muzzle of a revolver was levelled at his heart.

"Keep where yer are!" the intruder warned menacingly. "I'm pretty 'andy with this shooter. Better be careful."

The Regular Failure

"Who—who the devil are you?" Jake Bolton growled. "What——"

"Ain't got no visiting-cards with me," the unwelcome visitor cut in. "But I'm the chap as got into No. 21 Crayleigh Gardens last night."

"What the blazes d'yer mean? I——"

The intruder laughed harshly, and moved nearer.

"You can save yer breath, mate," he said. "I saw yer leaving the other joint after you'd croaked old Mordaunt, and I dogged yer here. I've read what 'appened. You got away with a nice little 'aul, and I 'ad my usual rotten luck. I've been doing a bit o' thinking and I reckon we're goin' 'alves in them sparklers and fimsies."

An oath came from Bolton's lips, and he half rose. A threatening movement of the revolver made him change his mind.

"We're goin' 'alves," the intruder repeated. "Some blokes 'as all the luck, but this is about the first bit that's come my way. What yer got to say, mate?"

"The swag ain't 'ere," Jake Bolton answered with another oath. "I got rid of it——"

"Bad luck for yer if yer 'ave," the other snarled. "They'll find yer body 'ere in the morning. You're going to split with me or you'll never crack another crib. You'd better come across with it, mate. Where's the swag? I'll bet it's 'ere somewhere."

Bolton "Gives In."

JAKE BOLTON'S hands clenched till the nails bit into his palms.

"Hang the ugly blighter!" he muttered inwardly. "'E's got the drop on me, but——"

His thoughts took another turn. For the moment resistance was impossible; he must wait and trust to cunning. He would pretend to agree, and then—well, he had taken a life the previous night, and he would not hesitate to take another. His expression changed, and the anger faded from his face,