

## Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No. 3

"Instead of going," he said, "she just nestled closer to Nick, and lisped out: 'You're a nice man; you've mended my dolly. Tell me a story, a nice story, wiv fairies and fings in it.' 'And then will you run straight back to bed, Bessie?' Nick asked. The kiddie declared that she would, and——"

"Come off it, old man!" Deakin exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that——"

"Yes, I am telling you the blunt truth, Deakin," Dixon Hawke interposed. "Seated there by the dying fire in the library, with the famous Star of Pietsdorff within reach of his hand, Nick Temple began to tell the kiddie a story. He had hardly started when there came another interruption."

Dixon Hawke paused as though expecting questions, but his listeners waited with silent interest.

"The child heard it first," Hawke went on. "The soft swish of a woman's skirt in the corridor. 'That's my mummy,' she whispered. 'I spects I've going to get into trouble 'cos I've not in bed. Will you ask mummy not to be cwooss wiv me?'"

"Without answering, Nick Temple set the child down in the chair, gentlemen," he continued, "and he sprang to his feet at the very moment Helen Raynor entered the room. She was a beautiful girl; she had married young, and, as I reminded you, she was on the eve of her twenty-fifth birthday. All the beast in Nick Temple flashed to the surface again then, and he whipped his revolver from his pocket, holding it so that the child in the chair could not see it. 'Keep quiet,' he snarled out in a threatening whisper. 'I won't harm you if you keep quiet. If you raise an alarm I swear I'll kill you and the child as well.'"

"What did Mrs Raynor do?" Deakin asked in low tones.

"Walked across to the chair and bent and kissed her little daughter," Hawke replied. "Keep still and do not make a noise, darling," she said. 'Mother is going to talk to this gentle-

man.' 'He is a nice man, mummy,' the kiddie murmured confidentially. 'He mended my dolly.' What do you suppose Helen Raynor did then, gentlemen?"

The others shook their heads.

"As she entered the room," Hawke explained, "she had seen her child seated on Nick's knee. Now, Helen Raynor was a brave girl and a clever girl, clever enough even then to detect the gentleman beneath the beast and the criminal. She walked straight up to Nick and held out her hand. 'Please give me that revolver,' she said as calmly as if she were asking for a match. 'I know you would not use it against a woman.' She did not wait for an answer; she simply took the weapon from Temple's hand."

### A Child's Kiss.

A SHORT laugh broke from Chief Inspector Deakin's lips.

"If any other man had told us this yarn, Hawke," he said, "I'd have accused him of pulling our legs. What next?"

"Helen Raynor asked Nick for his name," Hawke replied, "and, of course, he lied. It didn't work because she had seen his photograph in the papers at the time of his release, and she surprised him by telling him a good deal about himself.

"It may seem difficult to realise as you sit here, gentlemen, but Nick told her the whole yarn. I don't mean that he whined for mercy; it was not in Nick Temple's nature to whine to any man or woman breathing. But he told her how he had been a gentleman cracksmen from the time he had left Cambridge, and how in the end I had roped him in and he'd been sent for a seven-year stretch. He had told her how he had boasted that he'd play another innings against the law, and how he'd planned to collar the famous Star of Pietsdorff."

"May I venture a guess as to the end of the story?" one of the Scotland Yard

men drawled lazily. "Mrs Raynor allowed Nick Temple to go."

"Yes, she let him go," Dixon Hawke answered. "But that is not quite the end of the story. Helen Raynor knew that, with one choking grip of his powerful hand, Nick could have silenced the child, who by now had fallen asleep in the chair; she knew that it was the gentleman beneath the crook that had made him hesitate. She asked for no promises, but she looked him straight in the eyes, and told him she believed he had played his last innings against the law."

"He left by the window?" Inspector Deakin queried.

"No," Hawke answered. "Helen Raynor said she could let him out by a back entrance, and she told him to wait in the library while she went to ascertain if the coast was clear.

"As Mrs Raynor returned," Dixon Hawke remarked, "the child woke and scrambled from the chair. 'Bessie wants to kiss you,' she said sleepily, toddling towards Nick Temple. 'You're a nice man; you've mended my dolly, and you've told me a nice story wiv fairies and fings,' Nick read his permission in the mother's eyes, and bent and kissed the little one's cheeks. A minute later he had gone.

"As I have said, gentlemen, that is not quite the end of the story. Let's have another drink."

### Nick's Last Innings.

THE waiter placed the drinks on the table, and the little audience settled back in their chairs to hear the rest of Hawke's yarn.

"I'm afraid I shall have to talk about myself for a bit in the final act, gentlemen," he said half-apologetically. "I suppose it was just coincidence, a freakish twist of fortune's wheel, that took me down into Kent that night when Nick Temple played his last innings as a crook. I'd been helping the local police in the Deighton affair."

"I recollect it well," Chief Inspector

## The Gentleman Crook

Deakin said with a nod. "Apparent robbery and murder at Deighton's place near Sevenoaks, and you proved afterwards that it was suicide."

"Yes, that's right. The job was finished, and I missed my train at Sevenoaks. It meant a goodish wait for the next, and I was told I could save time by walking to Kenley. The facts I have already related to you happened between seven-thirty and eight o'clock in the evening, and it was approaching ten when I reached Kenley. It is a quiet little spot, and, not far from the station, I caught sight of Nick Temple."

"Did he see you?" Deakin asked.

"No, I took good care of that," Dixon Hawke replied grimly. "I knew his tall, powerful figure directly I spotted it, and it didn't take me many seconds to reflect that Nick Temple was not down in the hop-country for the good of his health.

"I gave up all idea of my train, and determined to keep an eye on Temple. He was standing under a lamp, and when he turned his head I saw the expression on his face. It was an ugly look. I felt doubly glad that I had spotted him, because I was convinced that Nick was up to mischief. I could see it in his eye. Suddenly he started off across country at a good pace, and I trailed him. His destination was——"

"Kenley Hall," Inspector Deakin cut in.

"Yes, he was going back," Dixon Hawke answered gravely. "I saw him climb the wall, and I managed to get near enough in the pitch darkness to hear him muttering to himself. I heard him say something about being a soft-hearted fool."

"Exactly!" Deakin commented. "He was already regretting the opportunity he had thrown away. Did you arrest him, Hawke?"

"Would you have done such a silly-ass thing?" the criminologist challenged. "To have arrested Nick then might have meant his getting twelve months. I guessed that he was starting on that