

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No. 3

new innings, and I wanted his middle-stump—to get him with the goods!

"The longer a term for which you can send such a man to jail, the safer for society. As a matter of fact, I lost sight of him for a few minutes; the grounds are well wooded, and it was as black as ink. Then I spotted him again."

"Climbing?" Deakin queried.

Dixon Hawke smiled.

"I've got a notion that chess-player's brain of yours has got this yarn worked out to the end, Deakin," he said. "You'll know in a minute if your solution is correct. You are right at the moment. Nick Temple, the cat-burglar, was climbing to the first floor. I went round to the front, asked for Sir Richard Miskin, and warned him as to what was afoot. He nearly jumped out of his skin as he told me about the famous diamond in the safe in the library. He was for rushing upstairs at once, and I had difficulty in restraining him."

"You meant to get Nick Temple red-handed?" one of the detectives asked.

"Precisely," was the answer. "I told Sir Richard we'd let him actually get to work on the safe, and that is what we did. Helen Raynor was present when I interviewed her father, and I did not understand then why she looked so troubled."

"Nick had taken the precaution of opening the library door, as he had done before, but you can bet I didn't make a heap of noise. I saw him crouching there by the safe, twirling the dial, and it surprised me how quickly the door swung open. Of course, I didn't know then he had worked out the combination earlier in the evening. At the moment the safe door opened I switched on the light."

"Did Nick put up any fight?" Deakin asked.

"He had no chance," Dixon Hawke said grimly. "I had my automatic levelled at his heart. But there was something in his eyes that puzzled me as he met Helen Raynor's glance. 'Oh, why—why did you come back?'

she murmured. 'Come back?' Sir Richard snapped out. 'What do you mean, Helen?' 'Tell them, young lady,' Nick muttered.

Dixon Hawke paused to re-light his pipe.

"I can tell you, gentlemen," he went on, "I was pretty staggered when Mrs Raynor told us what had happened."

"Pretty plain why he came back, Mrs Raynor," I said. "You caught him in a soft moment, but he's a crook by nature, and he came back for the diamond."

"Nick Temple laughed at me then, gentlemen, the same defiant laugh I had heard before. 'You're mighty clever, Hawke,' he sneered, 'but you're too clever this time. I came to bring back—this'."

"The diamond?" murmured Deakin.

"Yes, the diamond. It lay in Nick's hand, glittering with a thousand different lights."

"But how on earth——?" one of the listeners exclaimed.

"Simple enough," Dixon Hawke drawled with a smile. "When Mrs Raynor left Nick Temple in the room for a few minutes the safe was still open, and the child was asleep. Nick took the stone."

"When he had gone, Mrs Raynor closed the safe without looking inside the morocco case. The only part that is not simple to understand is the impulse that prompted Nick to replace the Star of Pietsdorff—unless the possibility of the gentleman triumphing over the criminal in the curiously complex nature of a man like Nick Temple."

"Well, that's the end of the yarn, gentlemen," Hawke said.

"Half a minute, Hawke," Deakin said. "You haven't explained about the letter and banknotes."

"Oh, the letter?" Hawke laughed. "It was from a friend of mine who owns a nice little farm in Australia. I advanced him the money to start. His name is Nick Temple. Good-night, gentlemen."