

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No. 3

Viewed from the standpoint of the underworld, Jake was a success in his own particular profession.

"Guess I know enough to get the best of the cops," he was wont to tell himself confidently. "They'll 'ave to be up early the day they wants to put a pinch o' salt on my tail."

He chuckled again as he crossed the road, and paused a second to dart a piercing glance to left and right through the black, choking fog.

The Safe at No. 17.

ONLY wealthy people resided in Crayleigh Gardens, and Jake Bolton cautiously opened the gate of No. 17, slipped inside, and crept down the area steps. For a moment or two a circle of radiance pierced the darkness, and then disappeared. Affixing a leather sucker to one of the panes of a small window, the crook cut out a piece of glass without making a sound. Half a minute later he was inside the house. He was in pitch darkness, but he did not show a light. Hands outstretched to avoid colliding with furniture, he moved forward with his peculiar gliding gait in the direction where he knew he would find the door leading to the hall.

No. 17 Crayleigh Gardens was the residence of a wealthy bachelor, by name Peter Mordaunt, and Jake had had his eyes on the place for some time; the cracksman had his own methods of gleaning information, and a plan of the house was imprinted on his retentive brain. He knew that the servants slept on the top floor, and that the safe in the library contained a valuable haul of jewels and money.

"Second floor, on the left," Jake mused to himself as he crept up the flight of stairs to the hall and groped for the door-knob.

It turned noiselessly, and he slipped inside, closing the door gently behind him. Always cautious, his first move was to cross to the windows to make

sure that the thick curtains precluded any possibility of his electric torch being seen from the outside. Then the patch of white light rested on the safe.

"Lever lock, but a pretty good one," he murmured critically. "It'll take a bit o' time to get inside, but it's going to be worth the trouble. This 'ere Peter Mordaunt will be paying a visit to the insurance company to-morrow, or my name ain't Bolton."

Unfastening his jacket, the crook proceeded to remove a number of tools attached to a belt round his waist. Then he drew on a pair of rubber gloves.

"Now to work," he murmured. "I reckon it'll take me——"

The words ended, and Jake Bolton's big, powerful frame stiffened involuntarily; he could scarcely be certain that he heard anything, yet some curious instinct seemed to warn him of danger. Noiselessly he sprang behind the door, his right hand whipping a heavily-weighted life-preserver from his pocket. He heard the sound distinctly now—a step on the stairs—and the fragrant odour of burning tobacco reached his nostrils.

His "Lucky" Night.

THE door opened, and there came a click as the electric lights blazed up. At the same instant Jake Bolton's right arm descended, and, without uttering a cry, Peter Mordaunt lurched and fell. Switching off the lights, the cracksman flashed the rays of his torch on his victim's face; the man was fully dressed wearing a velvet smoking-jacket. The cigar that had fallen from his lips lay smouldering on the carpet.

"Reckon 'e must 'ave been reading or writing up in 'is room," Bolton muttered. "Pr'aps 'e come down for a——"

Again he stopped abruptly, as he bent lower over the motionless form. "Gosh! I—I've croaked 'im!"

The Regular Failure

square, never dreaming that grim murder had been committed in one of the lofty, imposing-looking houses.

In the garden of No. 21, the town residence of Lord Richard Veldon, a dark form crouched behind a tall shrub. As the methodical regulation tramp of the policeman grew fainter, a man emerged stealthily, a man who muttered a string of hoarse oaths under his breath.

"Another failure!" he snarled. "It's just like my cursed, rotten luck."

Ned Corby, better known in the underworld as 'The Bat,' had been a crook as long as he could remember. He had first been in the grip of the police before he was fifteen years of age; and since that time a considerable portion of his life had been spent in prison. He was well known to the police; his description, fingerprints, and photograph were all recorded at Scotland Yard.

If there was any truth in Jake Bolton's confident boast that he was a successful cracksman, it could be said with equal truth that The Bat was a rank failure. He was a thin, undersized man, with sharp features, receding chin, low forehead, and a pair of dark, heavy eyes that seemed to expand in the dark like cat's eyes. His face revealed brutality, vice, and a certain degree of low cunning, but it lacked the faintest semblance of courage.

The Bat knew that he was a failure, and he knew that his associates of the underworld regarded him with contempt. He hated them for it, almost as fiercely as he hated his natural enemies—the police. Always he was telling himself that his chance would come to bring off a successful coup, a big haul that would enable him to leave the country and live in luxury. He had thought his chance had arrived that night; he had read in the papers that Lord Richard Veldon and his family were out of town, and that only an old caretaker had been left in charge of the mansion in Crayleigh Gardens.

Thankful for the fog, just as Jake

It was no feeling of remorse or horror that brought a hoarse note into Jake Bolton's voice; but even the most hardened of criminals is likely to be startled by the knowledge that he has committed murder. There is always the thought of the penalty—the ugly picture of the hangman's rope.

"'E's done for," Bolton muttered. "Well, 'e's got 'imself to thank for it; he shouldn't 'ave come nosing about down 'ere at this time o' night. No need for me to get jumpy; there ain't going to be nothing to fix this job on me."

Rising to his feet he stepped out into the hall and listened intently at the foot of the stairs.

"No one moving," he muttered, returning to the room. "'E can't 'ave come down 'cause 'e 'eard anything; I reckon 'e wanted a book, or pr'aps 'e was after a drink. No need for me to worry."

With a shrug he moved back to the safe. Then he paused once more, swung on his heel, and searched the dead man's pockets. A half-stifled exclamation broke from his lips when he found a bunch of keys, and his gloved hands shook with eagerness as he turned back to the safe. A few seconds later the big iron door swung outward.

"Gosh! What a bit of luck," Bolton murmured.

His eyes glittered greedily at the sight of a number of crisp banknotes and Treasury notes, and he gave vent to another cry as he opened a drawer, from which there came the glitter of precious gems.

"Gosh! It's my lucky night," he muttered. "It's my lucky night, and no blooming error."

Ned The Bat.

STILL muttering disgusted remarks to himself concerning the weather, the stalwart constable, whose beat included Crayleigh Gardens, again passed slowly through the fashionable