

the residence of Mr. Richard White?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Well," continued the voice, "is Mr. Carleton Dudley there? If so, I should like to speak with him."

"Who are you, please?" I asked.

There was a slight pause. Then the strange voice said:

"I am Herr Otto Schmalz, the preventer of crime."

Even now I can remember the chill of fear that crept over me as I heard his answer. Afterward, Dudley told me that when I turned and handed him the telephone, my face was as white as a sheet; but despite my agitation, I listened keenly to what he said.

"Yes," he began, in answer to a question, "I am Mr. Dudley. What? How do you know I took them out? Oh, it is your business to know such things! You say they are in danger of being stolen, and that you may be able to prevent it? How can you do so? Oh, that is your business, too. Well, hold the wire a moment." He put his hand over the mouthpiece and raised his face to mine. It was gray and drawn. "Dick," he whispered, "this man knows that I brought those jewels here. He says that they are in danger of being stolen, but that he can stop it, as his profession is the prevention of crime. He wants to come here at once. What shall I tell him?"

"It's loaded, all right," he remarked with a smile as he slipped it into his pocket. "Now let them come."

Then we sat silently waiting. Presently the door-bell rang, and a moment later one of Dudley's servants threw open the door and ushered two men into the room.

Never have I seen so strange a pair. One of the men was very short and very thin, with queerly twisted legs and a face that oddly suggested a fox-terrier. The other was enormous — exceedingly tall and remarkably fat. He seemed like a perfect mountain of flesh surmounted by a mis-shapen head that resembled a pine-cone. His face was flabby and babyish, and his great round eyes peered stupidly from behind spectacles with lenses at least an eighth of an inch thick. There was something wrong with the circulation of his blood, which caused him to fall asleep even while he was speaking.

The little man was the first to advance.

"Mr. Carleton Dudley?" he said inquiringly as he glanced from one to the other of us. Dudley bowed. "And Mr. Richard White, I presume?" pursued the little man, looking at me. I also bowed. "Very good," he continued grandiloquently, much after the fashion of a "lecturer" in a dime museum. "Permit me, Mr. Dudley and Mr. White, to present Herr Otto Schmalz, the preventer



The sudden confirmation of my wild fears served to intensify them. It did not seem improbable that the diamonds might mysteriously vanish before our very eyes. Every possible precaution seemed worth taking; so I leaned forward and cried:

"Tell him to come at once!"

He did so, and laid the telephone aside.

"He says that he will be here in five minutes," he told me. "It surely is a very singular affair!"

A strange thought had flashed upon me.

"Suppose," I exclaimed hoarsely, "that this man himself—this Schmalz—is a thief?"

Dudley's jaw dropped, and he gazed at me stupidly. At last, with a quick, impatient gesture, he pulled himself together, and, sitting up, carefully returned the diamonds to the chamois bag. This done, he dropped the bag into a tobacco-jar that stood upon the table, taking pains to cover it with the tobacco. Then he looked at me with a smile.

"Even if he is," he said lightly, "he will never think of looking for them there. That hiding-place is too simple. There they will remain until morning, and you and I will take turns watching over them. Have you a pistol?"

"Yes," I answered.

Opening a drawer in the table, I produced the weapon. He leaned over and, taking it from my hand, examined it carefully.

of crime."

Dudley and I bowed once more. The mountain of flesh quivered. Then, after taking a quick, darting survey of his surroundings, he waddled across the room, seated himself upon a divan, gave an enormous sigh, and promptly went to sleep.

"I may add that I am Jonas Edgewood," said the little man, "private secretary to Herr Schmalz. I believe that you wish to consult us personally, Mr. Dudley?"

"It was Herr Schmalz who asked for a consultation," retorted Dudley sharply; "but on so informal an introduction, and upon so grave a matter, I scarcely feel justified—"

He paused. The little man smiled at him calmly.

"Ah," he said, "I see. Even our knowledge of your removal of the magnificent Dudley diamonds has not convinced you of Herr Schmalz's ability to prevent their theft. Wait!" He crossed the room, and, catching hold of Schmalz's arms, shook him with all his might. His efforts scarcely moved the gigantic figure. It was not until he had bawled the preventer's name many times that the great, round eyes opened sleepily.

"Vell?" asked the mountain crossly. "Mr. Dudley is not yet convinced," explained his secretary. "You will have to tell him more."

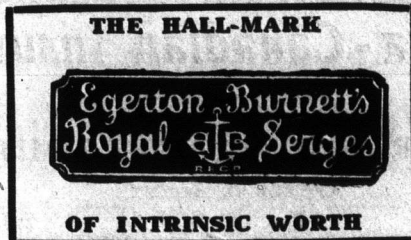
An expression like that of a disappointed baby's crossed Herr Schmalz's face, and he sighed ponderously. Then,

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