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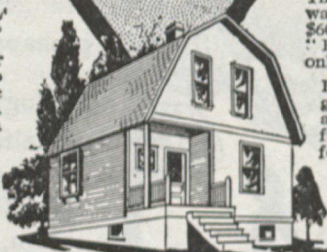
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the actions of other people. It does not appear to have struck you," again he cleared his throat, "that people will say you are probably only doing tardy justice to a child for whom you ought always to have been responsible—who is, in fact, your own child."

A dark flush mounted to Giles' forehead, a flush of indignation shot into his eyes, for a moment he was speechless, then he laughed shortly.

"Upon my soul, the world is a scurrilous place," he said at last, "such an interpretation of what seemed to me a very obvious line of conduct never even entered my head, and—"

"But having entered it," Mr. Duncan interrupted smoothly, "you will surely let it have some influence upon your line of action?"

"If you mean that I shall alter what I intend to do because a pack of scandal-mongers may let their own evil imaginings besmirch my conduct, then most emphatically, no. What you tell me will not make the slightest difference to my line of action."

"You mean—"

"I mean that, having weighed the whole thing thoroughly, and looked at it from all reasonable points of view, I intend to undertake the guardianship of the child known as Sylvia Burnett. Her mother, when dying, entrusted the child to my care, and as I am quite unable to discover any relations who have a better claim to her than I have, I propose, as I have already told you, to adopt her."

"But not to give her your name?" the lawyer interposed hastily.

"Certainly not. Why should I?" Faint surprise was in Giles' accents. "I still hope that I may some day come across her own people. Both her father and mother must have had some belongings, and though I gather that there was some great tragedy, perhaps worse, in Mrs. Burnett's past, no decent people would allow that to interfere with their treatment of her child. If I find any relations for Sylvia they will surely condone whatever wrongs her mother may have done, and be good to her. Meanwhile, I make myself responsible for the poor little soul."

"You have taken every possible step to discover whether there are any relations who could relieve you of this burden."

"I have done everything I can think of, but quite without success. My advertisements have brought no answers, I can find no trace of Mrs. Burnett's relations, or of where they lived."

"You know her maiden name?"

"No, there was not the least clue to it amongst any of her papers: there was nothing to give me a clue either in her papers, or in any of her possessions. She—" he hesitated, "she handed over to me, with her daughter, a very remarkable jewel, a jewel, I should imagine, of great value," again Tredman paused, to resume after a moment, "what I tell to you I tell you of course in confidence" (Mr. Duncan bent his head in acquiescence), "the dying lady said some words to me when she spoke of that jewel, words which puzzled me at the time, and have puzzled me ever since."

"Can you remember them now?"

"Yes—oh! yes. They sound curiously incoherent and yet—I am sure that there is some deep meaning in them. If only she could have ended her sentence, if only she could have said all that she evidently wished to say before death ended her sentence, I think she would have given me the clue to all I want to know."

"And what were those words?"

"They were very incoherent—very broken—she said, 'In the ivory box—there is the jewel—it is the clue—never lose it—never let him know—never let him know—that she—' and that was all."

"Never let him know," the lawyer repeated slowly, "never let who know? What did she mean by that? To whom was she alluding?"

"I have no idea—unless—possibly, she spoke of Sylvia's father. She spoke again of some man—at the very end—when she whispered, 'do not let him take her to kill her soul and—' and again the sentence ended abruptly. It was quite plain that some man had made havoc of the poor creature's life, and that she was in mortal terror lest he should also do harm to the child. But who, or where

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