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ness darker. By the first post he received a letter, bearing the West Central postmark, and typewritten. It was brief, and very much to the point.

"Sylvia will be sent back to you, if the jewel—called by her the wonder jewel—is given back to its rightful owner. It was stolen by Sylvia's mother. If you are willing to restore it, insert an advertisement to that effect on the front page of the Morning Post, heading it 'Sylvia.'"

The effusion was shown by Giles to the local police and also to a detective from Scotland Yard, whose aid he had sought; and both authorities strongly urged him to temporize, to insert an advertisement and await the result. To the Scotland Yard official, an intelligent individual named Stokes, Giles told the whole story of the first meeting with Sylvia and her mother, and of the ivory box and its precious contents which Mrs. Burnett had given him on her death bed. "She insisted most strongly that the jewel was the child's property," he wound up by saying, "and I have always supposed that she must have alluded to Sylvia's father when she implored me to keep the little girl out of some man's hands. I gathered that this man, whoever he was, was someone to be feared and avoided, and that both the child and the jewel were to be kept from him at all costs. It is obvious that someone traced Sylvia here, and now means to blackmail me. If I only knew the child was not in any danger or difficulty."

"Whoever wrote you that letter isn't going to let you know anything about the little lady," Stokes said shrewdly. "He will want to keep you on tenterhooks as much as ever he can, till he sees what chance he's got of having that jewel."

"Which he certainly won't get, whoever he may be," Giles said sternly, "the jewel is Sylvia's, practically her whole inheritance. I have no intention of parting with it."

"The next thing the writer of the letter will do will be to threaten the child's life," the detective answered. "Unscrupulous people, such as this one must be, stick at nothing. And if, by any chance, he has got his knife into you for any reason, he means to do his utmost to hurt you, come what may."

"I have no notion why anybody should, as you say, have his knife into me," Giles answered in puzzled tones. "As far as I know, I have not an enemy in the world. I adopted the little girl we have lost, because she seemed to be entirely alone, thrown on her own resources. I had no means of tracing any relations or friends; she did not appear to possess any. And who, or what, the writer of this letter can be, I cannot imagine."

"What about the little lady's father?" asked the detective. "Was her mother a widow when you met her? Or was there a husband somewhere in the background?"

Giles shook his head. "I don't know, I never knew," he answered. "The poor mother died without really telling me anything about herself or the child, and I could find nothing amongst her things to give any clue to her identity. The whole thing is mysterious, and the way in which somebody has suddenly discovered that I have charge of Sylvia and her jewel is not the least mysterious part of the whole affair."

Acting on the advice given him, Giles inserted the following advertisement in the Morning Post:

"Sylvia.—Willing to negotiate about the wonder jewel. Give further details.—Giles." And the day after the insertion appeared, another typewritten letter reached him by post.

"Dear Sir," it ran,— "The wonder jewel to which you refer, is my property, stolen from me by the lady known to you as Sylvia Burnett's mother. I have no desire or intention of meeting you face to face. I should therefore be glad if you would post the jewel to me by registered packet. Please address it to Mr. Smith, c/o Mr. J. Cox, Stationer, 155, Redman Street, Chelsea, S.W. Unless the jewel is in the gentleman's hands by Monday next at latest, Sylvia will be sent to join her mother. You are dealing with an unscrupulous and desperate man."

(To be continued.)

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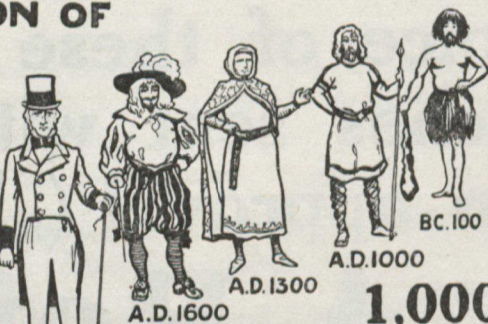
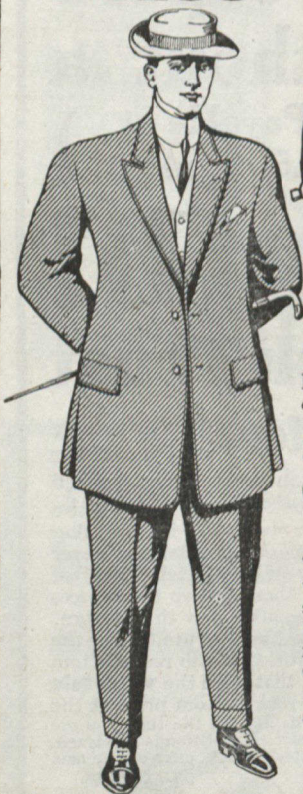
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