

mann Muller wants a thing desperately, he will have it at all costs."

"But why did you come to the Stansdales for it?" Hugh managed to interpolate into her stream of words.

"Because he had given the jewel to the youngest Miss Stansdale, the one of whom they never speak," and Rosa briefly recapitulated the story Miss Marion had told her.

"I can only guess that it was for Hermann's sake that she left her home and her family; but I discovered beyond a possibility of doubt, that the jewel in question was left to Sylvia Burnett by her mother."

"Then Sylvia's mother was a Miss Stansdale, is that what you mean?"

"I think there is no reasonable doubt about it," Rosa answered, "though there are no proofs whatever of the child's identity."

"But still I cannot understand why you blame yourself for anything?"

A burning flush of shame scorched her face.

"Because Miss Marion's chance observation of Sylvia's likeness to her sister gave me the idea of questioning the child. And I—I made Sylvia like me, and then persuaded her to tell me of her mother, of her mother's death, and so by easy stages about the jewel bequeathed to her by her mother. And then—" Rosa paused, her shamed eyes bent down, "then I told Hermann where the jewel was."

"But you say the child has disappeared—why?"

"Because Hermann is trying to force Sir Giles' hand. He threatens to kill little Sylvia unless the jewel is handed over to him."

"But that is mere bluff," Hugh exclaimed indignantly. "The police—"

"The police are not likely to baffle Hermann Muller," she interrupted, with a sort of deadly quietness, "they would not find it easy to trace him if—"

"If you were not putting them on his track," Hugh broke in, looking at her steadily. "Remember, by what you are telling me, you are putting this man into my hands."

"I forgot that," she faltered, "I forgot that," and every trace of colour died out of her face, leaving it ashen in hue. "When he finds out that I have betrayed him, he will kill me too. Not that I am afraid," she went on, lifting her head a little proudly, "I do not want to shirk the consequences of what I am doing in telling you the truth. I had to tell you, because little Sylvia must be saved."

"You think it is this man you call Hermann who has taken her away from Sir Giles?"

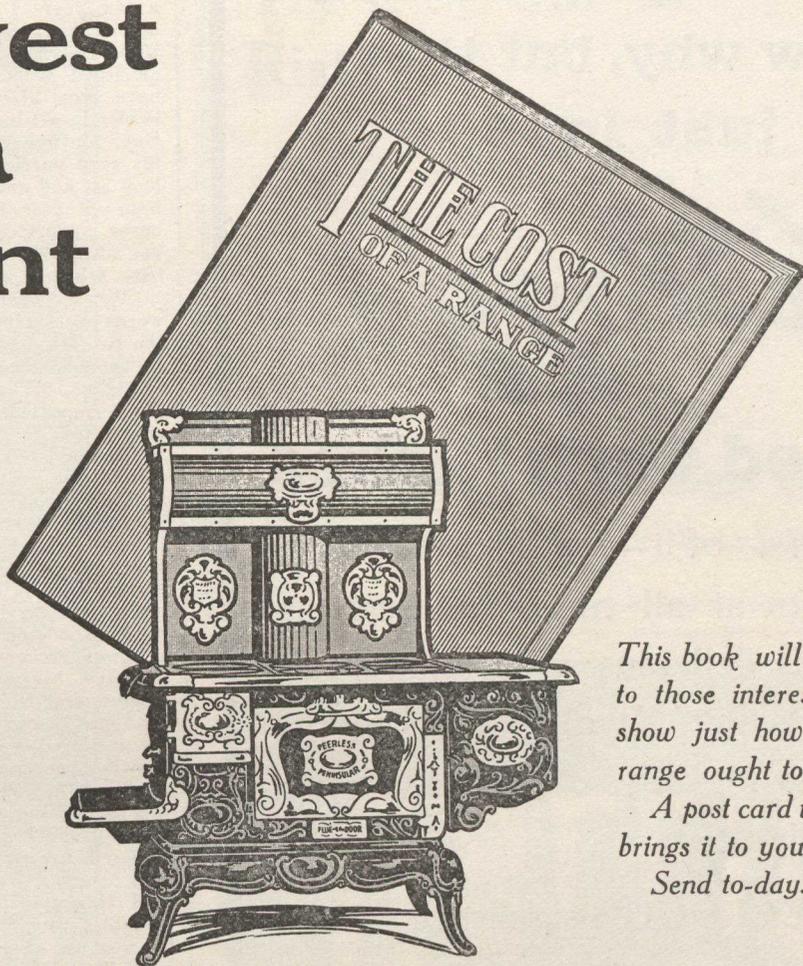
"I am sure of that, as sure as if I had seen it happen. No one else could have known that the jewel was in Sir Giles' hands, and he only knew because I told him. He has a grudge against Sir Giles, I do not understand why, excepting that Sir Giles seems to have been present when that poor lady, Sylvia's mother, met her death, and I think he hates Sir Giles for having befriended her. But I myself do not understand all which seems mysterious. I only know that Hermann would, if he could, do a bad turn to Sir Giles, and that now his chance has come, and he has taken it. And I—" her voice sank—"I have given him the chance."

Her stricken face, shamed eyes, the faltering accents of her voice, made an even more direct appeal than her beauty had done to all the tenderness in Hugh's nature. He bent towards her, and laid his hand upon hers.

"You made a mistake, you are doing your utmost to repair the mistake. None of us can do more."

"But all my life has been spent in a way you would hate and despise," she explained, the impulse to confess strong upon her. "I will not let you think better of me than I deserve, you shall know the worst of me, the very worst." She dragged her hand away from him, and sprang to her feet, continuing to speak in rapid, nervous accents, without giving him an opportunity of uttering a syllable. "I am a Russian, and my mother worked for Russia—for the Holy Cause she called it—and when I was a child I worked with her. That was noble work, she was a noble woman. But she died when I was only a little girl; my father had died long before, and I was left to the tender mercies

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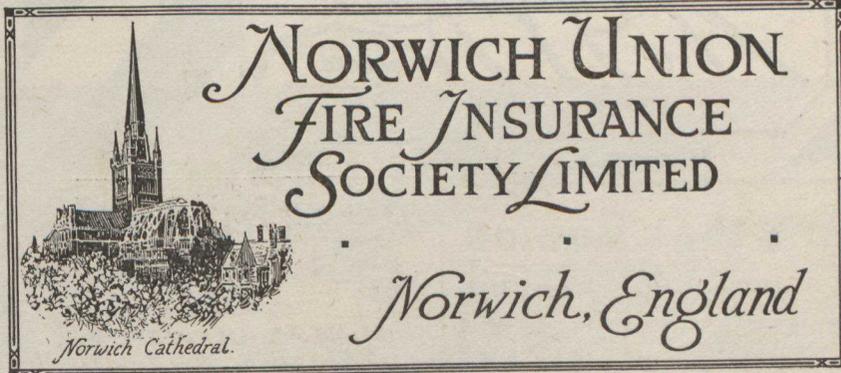


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