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Her Promise True.

BY DORA RUSSELL.

Author of "Footprints in the Snow," "A Country Sweetheart," "A Man's Privilege," etc.

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CHAPTER I. HUGH GILBERT and Belle Wayland are bidding each other good-bye at Brighton as he is about to sail for India with his regiment. Belle promises to be true and to wait for him until he returns. She promises to be true and to wait for him until he returns. She promises to be true and to wait for him until he returns.

CHAPTER II. Lady Stanmore comes to Brighton and has an important interview with Mrs. Wayland in which she decides Belle's future. Lady Stanmore reads a letter from Gilbert to Belle and lays her plans accordingly. She decides to intercept the letters between the lovers. Lord Stanmore becomes deeply interested in Belle and invites his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland, and Belle to spend a few weeks at his country residence.

CHAPTER III. Belle begins a diary in order that she may send an account of each day to her absent lover. CHAPTER IV. Lady Stanmore thinks over the situation. She decides that Belle is not in love with Jack. Lord Stanmore's cousin, Hugh, is invited to visit him at Hurst Hall. He is greatly smitten with Belle. Lady Stanmore opens a letter from Hugh Gilbert to Belle and burns it.

CHAPTER V. Lord Stanmore becomes jealous of Sir Dick. Belle tells Lady Stanmore of her engagement and that Lady Stanmore's idea of her going to Hurst Hall. CHAPTER VI. Belle's diary continued. She tells Lady Stanmore of her dream about Hugh. That day decides to write Mrs. Balfour.

CHAPTER VII. Lady Stanmore destroys a letter Belle has written to Hugh Gilbert. Jack Stanmore confesses his love for Belle to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland. Belle and the sister-in-law go to India on the same ship with Hugh Gilbert. It contains the starting news of Hugh Gilbert's marriage to Miss Vane. Belle is told the news and is greatly shocked. It takes a morning walk see break through the forest.

CHAPTER VIII. Stanmore rescues Belle from drowning. She takes cold and has a severe illness. A letter arrives for Belle during her illness and is destroyed by Lady Stanmore. CHAPTER IX. Belle is convalescent. Stanmore proposes to her and in her anxiety to show Hugh Gilbert that she has forgotten her past, she accepts the offer. Stanmore and his sister-in-law arrange matters and Belle acquiesces. The marriage is arranged for an early day.

CHAPTER X. The eve of the wedding. Lady Stanmore writes to her friend in Bombay and tells her of the marriage and specially requests that the news be told Hugh Gilbert whom she represents as a friend only of Belle's. CHAPTER XI. The wedding. Lord and Lady Stanmore return to Redvers Court. Belle is not happy and Stanmore sees that she has not learned to love him. Sir Dick and Lady Probyn call upon them and invite them to dine at Hurst.

CHAPTER XII. Flaming with fire. Sir Dick grows more in love with Lord Stanmore's wife which causes a mother much uneasiness. Stanmore also notices the young man's infatuation and warns Belle against encouraging him. They dine at Hurst and Belle is presented to Lady Probyn the vicar and Sir Dick's old tutor, and his daughter Amy who has known and loved Sir Dick Probyn from his boyhood as they have lived together but who only regards Amy with a sisterly affection.

CHAPTER XIII. Sir Dick offers a diamond pendant to Belle but she refuses to take it. She tells him his confession of love must end a pleasant friendship and he goes home in despair. He decides that life is not worth living and attempts to shoot himself but his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland, intervenes and had followed him screams when she sees what he is about to do and the bullet goes through his chest. Lord Stanmore believes Belle is to blame for encouraging Sir Dick and reads her a lecture which she resents.

CHAPTER XIV. An unforgettable face. Lord and Lady Stanmore have an understanding and are better friends. She tells him all about her interview with Sir Dick. The Stanmore's get an invitation to a ball at Marchmont Court. They go there and Belle and Hugh Gilbert meet. After the shock has somewhat died away she requires for his wife and leaves him to his own devices.

CHAPTER XV. The lost letters. Belle and Captain Gilbert have mutual explanations in which Lady Stanmore's treachery is revealed. Lord Stanmore is introduced to Gilbert and asks him to dine with them the following day. Belle accuses her aunt of destroying her letters and the latter acknowledges her guilt but nothing of the situation is told to Stanmore who receives Captain Gilbert very kindly and invites him to Scotland for the shooting season and at Belle's request the latter consents to go.

CHAPTER XXIV.—(Continued.)

There was a rustic seat in front of the boathouse which was also rustic and picturesque, and here Belle and Gilbert sat down. Again there was a short silence, for Belle was trying to find words in which to describe the bitter memory of the dark morning when her misery seemed too great to bear. Presently Gilbert looked at her inquiringly, his eyes resting lingeringly on the charming profile slightly turned away from him.

"I am thinking how to begin," said Belle, who felt his gaze, though she had not looked at him; "it was the day after Mrs. Balfour's letter came—the day after, Hugh. I had read that you were married to Miss Vane."

"Lady Stanmore invested and wrote that lying postscript I have no doubt," interrupted Gilbert, sternly.

"I also have no doubt," continued Belle, "but when I read it, Hugh, I never dreamt of this. I believed—and the blow was very hard to bear."

"It was a cruel and shameful act! I cannot bear to look at that woman, Belle, or near her. You asked me to be civil to her, but it is almost impossible to me."

"If we have ever to see each other, Hugh, I fear it is a necessity. She is an unscrupulous woman, and—I am afraid to quarrel with her."

"Yet I never can forgive her. But go on, Belle. It was the day after your reading that postscript that your accident here happened, you said."

"I never shall forget that day; the whole world seemed changed to me, and all that was worth living for seemed done. Hugh, I spent a sleepless night, and in the morning when Aunt Lucy came in, to see her work I suppose, I was crouching over the fire, chilled with misery. She wanted me to go down to breakfast, but I refused, and after she had left me—I remember it so well—a sudden shower of hailstones came rattling against the windowpanes. I looked up, and then thought bitterly what was anything to me in the world outside or in. Then a strange restlessness came over me; a wild despair. I determined to go out and walk in the driving storm. I dressed with feverish haste, but when I was out the snow had blinded me, and I scarcely knew where I went. Then—oh, Hugh! how can I tell you this?—I saw lying before me the half-frozen waters of the lake, and—may God forgive me—the mad thought rushed into my heart that I would go on

the frigid ice, and so end my misery for ever."

"Belle? Belle? you should not have told me this," cried Hugh Gilbert, starting to his feet in uncontrollable emotion; "you unman me; completely unman me!"

"I wanted you to know," continued Belle, in a broken voice, "what all this has cost me; to know that I meant to be true to the promise I had made you, and that I never would have broken it but for that false lie. But let me go on with the miserable story. The ice bore me at first and I ran on; then suddenly it began to crack. I tried to turn back then, but it was too late. It split all around me, and I sank into the water. I remember a choking feeling of suffocation, and then nothing more. It was Stanmore who saved me; he had seen me go out in the storm from the windows and followed me. He swam into the half-frozen lake, and got me out more dead than alive—but I was very ill for long after."

"Then it was Lord Stanmore who saved you? To him you owe your life?" said Gilbert, gloomily. Somehow the idea was inexplicably bitter to his heart.

"Yes, Stanmore; it was very brave of him—after this—some time after, he asked me to marry him, and Aunt Lucy wished it—and I did."

Gilbert made no answer; he began walking up and down in front of the seat where Belle was sitting with restless footsteps; he was evidently greatly disturbed. Then suddenly he stopped; he hesitated, as if he were about to speak some words he had not strength to say.

"We must not talk of these things any more," said Belle, gently, looking up in his troubled face; "but I am glad we both know them; anything is better than to lose belief and trust, it is—"

"We love," murmured Gilbert, in a low voice. "Yes, that is the worst."

"A sort of icy feeling fell on my heart," continued Belle; "I went into the world; I became one of it. I was a hard, cold woman till I saw you again, Hugh. Stanmore called me an ice woman once, and I thought I was."

"And now?" asked Gilbert, still in that low voice.

"Now I believe again," answered Belle, softly. "I know at least you were not untrue."

Again Hugh Gilbert hesitated; then he looked at her earnestly, and once more sat down by her side.

"Belle," he said, "tell me truly, do you still wish me to go to Scotland, after you have told me this?"

"Yes," she answered, "I still wish it. I wish us to be friends; friends that cannot change."

She held out her hand as she spoke, and took it in his own. It was a silent compact between them, and they spoke no more of the past. Then presently he rose.

"I think I shall go now," he said, and she did not press him to remain. The secret sympathy between them told her that that he would not care to meet Stanmore that day.

"You look so tired, Hugh," she said.

"All this has upset me," he answered, "but I will see you soon again. Good-bye now."

Once more they clasped each other's hands, and then they parted. But Hugh Gilbert rode back to Marchmont with a bowed head and an unhappy heart. He had truly loved Belle; loved her at first perhaps for the sake of her fair face, but a stronger and deeper feeling towards her had quickly kindled in his breast. He had believed and trusted in her so thoroughly; been so sure of her love. The letter that Mrs. Balfour had shown him, in which Lady Stanmore informed her that her niece, Belle Wayland, was going to be married immediately to Lord Stanmore, had been a bitter blow to him. He thought he understood it all; a pretty girl, surrounded by worldly relations had succumbed to the temptation of marrying for wealth and position. He did not believe that Belle had quite ceased to love him. Their hearts had been too near akin he knew for such a change. She had been weak, and over-ruled, but this idea did not make the pang less keen.

And now when he knew all; knew that Belle had been shamefully deceived; that in her misery her life had seemed worthless to her, a great struggle took place in his mind.

"We had better not have met again," he thought, gloomily. "I should not, I suppose, go to Scotland. I tried to tell her this, but not the strength. The vile woman who lied to her has wrecked two lives."

CHAPTER XXV.—STRATHEN.

Belle, however, in the meanwhile was not thinking so despondingly. Gilbert's very presence made life brighter to her; filled her heart with new interests and hopes.

She would soon see him again; they were to be friends always, she told herself, and women-like this made her almost content. She did not reckon on the strong feelings in Gilbert's heart; nor remember the deep emotion that might sway and overwhelm his reason with irresistible forces.

She looked very bright when Stanmore and Lady Stanmore returned from Hurst. Her cheeks were aglow and her eyes shining, and after she had asked about Sir Dick, she told them of her visitor.

"Captain Gilbert has been here, Stanmore," she said.

"Has he? I'm sorry I missed him; did you not ask him to stay to dinner?" answered Stanmore.

"I did not ask him," replied Belle.

Lady Stanmore looked at Belle, but said nothing, and presently began to speak of the great change in Lady Probyn's appearance.

"I never saw a woman so changed," she said, "all her good looks are gone."

"I am afraid she has suffered great anxiety," said Belle, gently, and with much pity in her voice. "But I hope now all danger is over with Sir Dick?"

"He is terribly disfigured they say," remarked Stanmore, and for a moment he glanced at Belle.

"Did Gilbert say anything about joining us at Strathen?" he asked the next.

"He said something about going to Scotland," answered Belle.

"I must go over to Marchmont tomorrow, and settle the day for them to arrive. I have asked John Lee also; so, Belle, you will have four men to entertain."

"I do not think that will overwhelm Belle," said Lady Stanmore, smiling rather satirically.

"I am sure it will not," retorted Belle.

"I had a letter from the agent this morning," continued Stanmore, "and I want to see old Marchmont about that. There's a splendid moor to rent not far from Strathen, but they want a big rent for it. But I daresay the old fellow won't mind that."

And Stanmore did go over to Marchmont the next day, and Mr. Marchmont, senior, was only too delighted to hear of the moor that adjoined Strathen. This worthy couple made no secret between themselves at least—of their desire to rise in life, and to mix intimately with those whose birth was superior to their own.

"We can afford it," Mr. Marchmont would say contentedly, and his helpmate agreed with him. They were both ready to pay for their ambition, and a Highland moor, near Lady Stanmore's, would suit this.

The affair was soon settled. It was agreed that Mr. Marchmont, his son Jim, and Captain Gilbert, were to go down to Scotland two days after the Stanmores had arrived there, and that they were to be the guests of the Stanmores at Strathen until the arrangements for renting the new moor were completed.

Stanmore seemed glad to get from Redvers Court for a while. He was not used to country life, and his marriage had, no doubt, disappointed him. A man who has been accustomed to be flattered all his days by women does not take very kindly to indifference. And he was too shrewd not to see that Belle gave him no love.

"I have been a fool," he told himself; "a man of my age to marry a girl of hers—I had better have waited." And he sighed.

He was not a keen sportsman, but the purple and green stretch of the moorlands had always given him pleasure. In his brother's time—before the late lord's failing health had prevented his going yearly to Strathen—Stanmore had generally spent some weeks of the autumn in Scotland. The shooting lodge, as they called it, was in truth a charming house, situated amid the wildest and most romantic scenery. Built at the head of a loch, and surrounded on either side by lofty mountain crests, on whose rugged slopes the birch and red-berried rowan grew, Strathen possessed both for the sportsman and the artist everything that could be desired. A splendid trout stream even went gurgling by in a little valley below, and Stanmore was a good fisherman. The sport suited him better than the tramp over the fern-decked hills, and he started in good spirits for their journey north.

Belle never forgot the first morning when she awoke in her Highland home. She went to the window of her room, and everything outside seemed like fairyland. The sunlight was streaming down the glen in rosy floods; touching with crimson the mountain tops, and falling on the loch below in ripples of shimmering light.

It was a beautiful and romantic scene. At their feet the great hills still lay wrapped in purple shadows, though their summits were crowned with gold. And the solitude! The stillness! It had been dark when they arrived the night before, and Belle had been unable to judge of the wild beauty of Strathen. Her companions, too, had not been lively. Lady Stanmore was tired with the long journey, and rather cross, and Stanmore was sleepy. Belle, therefore, now stood delighted, gazing at the blue sky, and at the dark storm rent firs which grew thick and strong up the steep sides of the mountain hills, and in many places down to the very water's edge. It was so new to her; its grandeur, its wildness filled her heart with a strange feeling she could not define.

But presently a different thought stole into her mind. In another day Hugh Gilbert would be here, and they would look on this scene together, and watch the sunsets fall on the water, and the light die on the hills. Belle sighed softly; she wished the hours were winged until he came.

"He will think it so beautiful," she whispered to herself; more beautiful she knew because she would be by his side.

She went down to breakfast looking so fresh and fair that both Stanmore and Lady Stanmore complimented her on her appearance.

"Why, Belle, the Highland air has been like a beauty draught to you," said Stanmore, smiling.

"I am delighted—enchanted," answered Belle, with enthusiasm. "The scenery is quite perfect."

"How would you like it in a snow storm?" asked Stanmore.

"It would still be most grand; most beautiful."

"Not very grand for the poor sheep on the hillsides, though. I was once here in a storm, and the snow wrapped many a flock in its chill embrace. No; I shall never forget," and Stanmore slightly shivered, "the white world we could not escape from."

"Scotland must be perfectly dreadful in winter, I should think," said Lady Stanmore. "This is the time for it, and yet I confess I would soon weary of the loneliness if I remained here long."

"I should never weary of it," said Belle, in a low tone; but she was not thinking only of the beauties of Strathen.

She spent almost the whole morning in rambling among the craggy paths on the hills. Stanmore's agent called on him regarding the moor Mr. Marchmont was thinking of renting, and he had interviews with the keepers, and Belle was left very much to herself. And she was quite content that this should be so. Lady Stanmore was still tired with her journey, and remained indoors, except for a short walk during the afternoon.

"I shall be glad when the gentlemen come," she said to Belle. "It will make a little variety, and Sir John Lee is a gentlemanly man, and the two Marchmonts are durable."

She did not mention Hugh Gilbert's name, nor did Belle. Tacitly they had agreed never to speak of him, and Belle was glad of this. She could not tell her aunt what she thought, nor of Gilbert's

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bitter indignation against her

There was a kind of armed neutrality, indeed, between the aunt and niece, and neither hinted anything of this to Stanmore. But he, too, was glad when his expected guests arrived the next day in time for a very late dinner, or rather supper, and welcomed them cordially to Strathen.

And Belle? Was it the white dress she wore, with heather in her brown hair and at her breast, that made her look so fair as she went forward to receive their visitors? She did not exchange a word with one of them. There was a silent handclasp, the sweet consciousness of each other's presence, and they needed no more. Lady Stanmore watched them, and she was satisfied with Belle's manner.

"I've no doubt she's really grateful to me," she secretly thought, "though the pretended not to be. The young man looks rather indignant, but I was his best friend, too."

Gilbert, indeed, could scarcely hide his anger in Lady Stanmore's presence. And when he looked at Belle, when he remembered that this sweet woman would have been his—his very own—but for the scheming brain that had parted them, there was absolute hatred in his heart for Lady Stanmore.

But he was forced to hide this as best he could. She was agreeable to him, and he tried to respond. And they were naturally not thrown much together. The five men made an early start the next morning with the keepers and the dogs. Lady Stanmore did not come down to breakfast, but Belle did. Gilbert was standing looking out of the window down on the blue waters of the loch when she entered the room, and he turned round and advanced towards her.

"How beautiful all this is," he said, as they shook hands.

"I know you would think it beautiful," answered Belle, softly.

"Have you ever been here before?"

"Never. This is my first visit to Scotland."

At this moment young Marchmont also came into the room, and the conversation became general. Then the other men appeared, and all were eager for the tray on the moors except Gilbert. He lingered a moment by Belle's side when the rest had hurried into the hall.

"Will you be going out this morning?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she answered.

"But not on the moors?"

"No, I do not care for sport."

"I do not feel up to very much this morning, and will not stay long. When the others are having lunch I will come back here—it will allow me."

"I shall be very pleased when you come back."

Nothing more was said. Belle watched from the windows the men start, with a couple of keepers behind them, and some highly trained dogs, and two servants carrying a substantial luncheon basket. The saw them enter the narrow defile among the hills, that led to the moorlands beyond, and just as they disappeared Gilbert turned round and looked back. And her heart felt glad within her. How fresh and fair the world looked this August morn when she knew that her friend was near. Life had suddenly become full of beauty again to her, and the soul-sweariness that had possessed her had passed away.

"It is good to live, after all," she thought; and she went out and sat in the sunshine, her heart full of its new joy.

She knew how long she stayed. The shadows had begun to lengthen; the day had slightly changed, when she rose. And suddenly the idea struck her that she would go into the defile among the hills, where she had seen the house-party disappear. It was narrow and uneven, with fern hidden boulders scattered along the path, and coppices of birch and rowan growing under the crags. But the difficulty of guiding her footsteps was exciting to Belle in her present mood. And perhaps a vague hope too that she might meet Gilbert returning from the moorlands led her on. It this hope were in her heart it was presently realised. From behind a jutting rock, where the pathway took a sharp turn, he presently appeared. Belle was conscious that her face flushed crimson, and this consciousness embarrassed her. She wished to show no emotion, but to treat Gilbert as a friend, yet her burning cheeks and quickened breath she knew would be visible to his eyes.

But if he noticed these signs of agitation he did not appear to do so. He raised his shooting cap, and put down his gun which he was carrying when he met her.

"You see I've had enough of it," he said, smiling; "we have had splendid sport, though old Mr. Marchmont very nearly shot one of the keepers."

"Perhaps he is not used to the moors," answered Belle, smiling.

"I should think not; but now he is full of enthusiasm. What a wonderful ravine this is, to be sure!" added Gilbert, looking round. "I wonder what wild legends, what desperate raids, are connected with its name?"

"In the days of old? How things change, do they not?"

"It is a world of change," said Gilbert; and the expression of his face altered.

"But everyone does not change," answered Belle, somewhat wistfully.

"Unfortunately not; but circumstances always do. Are our lines written out for us, before we are born?"

"We seem to have no power over them at least," said Belle, and her eyes fell.

Gilbert stirred uneasily. He did not wish to approach any allusion to their own life wreck, yet to know they were drifting unconsciously towards it.

Perhaps Belle felt what was passing in his mind; she changed the subject. She spoke of returning to the shooting lodge.

"Lady Stanmore will be impatient for her lunch I suppose by this time," she said; "I have not seen her the whole morning."

"And where have you been?" asked Gilbert, looking at her.

"Sitting basking in the sun," answered Belle, smiling; "I could not stay indoors."

"The sun is good in these Northern latitudes, but I learnt to hate the Eastern sun during those dreary days at Bombay."

"And you did not like Bombay?"

"How could I?" said Gilbert, gloomily; and Belle was sorry she had asked the question.

"Let us turn now and go back to the Lodge," she suggested, and Gilbert took up his gun, and walked for a while silently by her side.

Then presently still in that altered voice, he returned to the subject of Bombay.

"I should not speak of it, I suppose," he said, "but walking here with you brings it all so vividly back to my mind. I went to Bombay with hope, as my companion, Belle, I returned from it with none."

"At least we were not to blame," answered Belle in a low tone.

"But does that make it less bitter? To me the knowledge that you were tricked into a loveless marriage adds a thousand times to my regret."

Belle sighed softly.

"We must not speak of these things, Hugh," she said.

"No," answered Gilbert, bitterly; "but it is impossible to forget them—at least to me."

CHAPTER XXVI.—A FEW MORE DAYS.

Lady Stanmore was walking up and down the narrow terrace in front of the house at Strathen, when she perceived Belle and Gilbert approaching, after they had quitted the mountain defile.

She advanced a few steps to meet them, and received them graciously.

"Good morning, Captain Gilbert; good morning, Belle," she said. "Have you been on the moors, Belle, as this is the first time I have seen you today?"

"No, I've been rambling about," answered Belle, "and I met Captain Gilbert returning from the moors."

"A very nice arrangement," continued Lady Stanmore, smiling.

"It is not an arrangement," but an accident," said Gilbert, sharply and quickly.

"A very nice accident then," answered Lady Stanmore, blandly. "But at all events I am exceedingly glad you have come for I am dying for my lunch."

"We ought all to be hungry in this lovely air," said Belle. "But come in now, lunch is sure to be ready."

Lunch was ready, but the fresh mountain air did not seem to have given Gilbert an appetite. He ate very little but did not say much. The presence of Lady Stanmore in fact always had an irritating effect on his nerves.

But when lunch was over, for Belle's sake he made an effort to conceal this.

"What are you ladies going to do this afternoon?" he asked. "I saw there was a boat-house and a little pier down at the loch. Would you like me to row you both for awhile? It is fine a day not to be out."

Both Belle and Lady Stanmore were ready to go. And presently they started over the rough shingle at the head of the loch, where Lady Stanmore declared cut herainty boots. But Belle did not seem to care about the roughness of the way, nor did she complain that her small feet were injured. And they soon reached the little wooden pier which jutted into the loch, and presently were on the broad still waters.

It was a pleasant August afternoon; the sky had cleared again, and as Gilbert rowed on, the beauty of the scenery struck them all. On either side of the loch hung over hanging rocks ascended high, their enormous shadows falling on the blue water, are reproducing there each rift and fissure in the grey granite masses, as well as the green patches of verdure which here and there dotted the mountain sides.

"It's something to dream of," exclaimed Belle, looking enthusiastically around.

"Do you ever see pictures in your dreams?" asked Gilbert in a low voice, looking intently with his sombre grey eyes in her face.

"I think I shall see this one," answered Belle.

"When I was in India," continued Gilbert, forgetting or ignoring Lady Stanmore's presence, "I used to dream of another picture, and hear the seashore sounding in my ears, as I had heard it in reality not long before."

Belle's eyes fell, and a wave of color stole to her face.

"Dreams are strange things," said Lady Stanmore. "But I seldom dream."

"Why could you have imagined it?" asked Lady Stanmore.

"Yours is not a dreamy nature, I should think."

"No I am thankful to say it is not," retorted Lady Stanmore. "We live in an active, stirring world, and it is no good going on dreaming romantic nonsense while we are in it."

"Perhaps when we are out of it we may indulge in our dreams," said Belle, as if half in jest and half in earnest.

"You'd better wait till you are then, Belle," answered Lady Stanmore, still rather in an aggrieved tone.