

PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

Her Promise True.

BY DORA RUSSELL.

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"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 comes back. Her mother and sister are very angry. Mrs. Wayland writes an account of the affair to her sister, Lady Stanmore, and the latter comes immediately to Brighton.

CHAPTER II.—Lady Stanmore comes to Brighton and has an important interview with Mrs. Wayland in which they decide 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 days 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 Hugh Gilbert. Jack Stanmore calls upon the party, and invites them 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. They go to Hurst Hall.

CHAPTER VI.—Belle's diary continued. She tells Lady Stanmore of her dream about Hugh. That lady decides to write Mrs. Balour.

CHAPTER VII.—Lady Stanmore destroys a letter Belle had written to Hugh Gilbert. Jack Stanmore confesses his love for Belle to his sister-in-law, Mrs. Wayland, and she tells her to let Belle go. Mrs. Wayland falls ill and the stay at Redvers Court is prolonged. Sir Dick and Lady Stanmore propose to Belle and she is refused. Lady Stanmore writes a letter from Mrs. Balour who went to India on the same ship with Hugh Gilbert. It contains the startle news of Hugh Gilbert's marriage to Miss Vane. Belle is shocked and is greatly shocked. In taking a morning walk she breaks through the ice.

CHAPTER VIII.—Lady 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 too has forgotten her accepts the offer. Stanmore and his sister-in-law arrange matters and settle 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 Ice Woman. 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 Stanmore call upon them and invite them to dine at Hurst.

CHAPTER XII.—FLAT-TOE WITH FIRE. Sir Dick grows more and more with Lord Stanmore's wife which causes a mother much uneasiness. Lord Stanmore also notices the young man's intonation and warns Belle against encouraging him. They dine at Hurst and Belle is presented to Mr. Drew, 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 grown up together but who only regards Amy with a sister's affection.

CHAPTER XIII.—Sir Dick offers a diamond pendant to Belle and she refuses; she tells him that 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 who had feared something and had followed him screams when she sees what he is about to do and the bullet goes through his cheek. Lord Stanmore believes Belle is to blame for encouraging Sir Dick and reads her a lecture which she resents.

CHAPTER XIV.—An unforgotten 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 and there Belle and Hugh Gilbert meet. After the shock has somewhat died away she enquires for his wife and learns that he has never been married.

CHAPTER XIX. (continued).

Sir Dick made no answer, and they speedily found themselves in a quiet country lane. Here with trembling fingers Sir Dick produced from his coat pocket a jeweller's case.

"I want to show you this," he said, and he opened the case.

It contained a really magnificent diamond and ruby pendant.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Belle, as the diamonds and rubies sparkled in the sun. "I never saw finer stones, or such big diamonds. I think and I took the case in her hand more closely to examine the jewels. "Why, Sir Richard, you must have spent a little fortune on this! It is for your mother, I suppose?"

"No, Stanmore," Sir Dick said. "I ordered it to be made for you—if you will honour me by accepting it."

Belle at once gracefully returned the case to him.

"No, Sir Richard, I could not possibly accept it," she said.

"But why?" burst forth Sir Dick, impatiently. "I had it made for you, because I want you to know what I feel; because you must know! It is in the shape of a heart, you see—and my whole heart is yours!"

"You should not say such things to me," answered Belle, yet more gravely.

"You know it is true! From the first time I saw you I loved you. I cannot help it. I asked you to be my wife then, and you refused me. Belle, Belle, you may still be my wife, if you will love me a little now."

"His stammer had disappeared; his face was impassioned, ardent, and handsome, but Belle looked at him without a heart throb.

"You forget poor Stanmore, I think," she said calmly.

"You do not love Stanmore?"

"No; nor do I love you," Sir Richard. "I am sorry you have said this, for I fear it will end a pleasant acquaintance."

Sir Dick staggered back as if he had struck him a fatal blow. He grew pale, almost grey-tinted, and his breath came as if in gasps. Belle felt sorry for him, no one could doubt his terrible pain.

"You will forget all this folly," she said after a few moments' silence; "you are young, and you will learn to love some nice girl, and make your mother happy."

"Never," answered the unhappy young man in a low hoarse tone.

"You think so now, but it will be so," continued Belle, not unkindly. "Men forget more easily than women do," she added, and for a moment her lips quivered. "Go away for a little while, and when you come back you will smile at what you have said to-day, and no one shall ever know it."

"Then you give me no hope?"

"How can you ask such a thing? I did

Stanmore sufficient wrong by marrying him when I did not love him, and I will wrong him no more."

Sir Dick said nothing further. He walked in silence by Belle's side until they reached the avenue of the Court, and then he stopped.

"Good-bye, Lady Stanmore," he said, still in that hoarse low voice.

"Good-bye," answered Belle, holding out her hand. "But won't you come on to the house, and let them bring your horse round?"

"No, I will go to the stables."

"And you will leave Hurst for a little while?"

"Yes, I will go away—do not quite forget me."

He left her before she could make any reply, but the grey, despairing look on his face haunted Belle, and she returned to the house in no happy mood.

"Poor fellow, he really cares for me," she thought; "it is strange, very strange—when the other turned so easily away."

Sir Dick's expression when he parted with Belle was a true index of his heart. A cold despair had fallen over him, and in a moment as it were, all his fond hopes had been dashed to naught. Belle's words when he had said "You do love Stanmore," and she had replied, "No, nor do I love you," rang again and again in his ears, as he galloped home through the pleasant country lanes, when the world had become all dark to him.

"What have I to live for?" he asked himself, and he answered "Nothing."

"It was all over; there had been no faltering in Belle's manner. He had loved his love on a woman who did not love him, and he knew this now only too well. Once he thought of his mother, but he thrust this idea impatiently away.

"Better she should see me dead than mad," he muttered gloomily; and in this dark and desperate mood he returned to Hurst.

In the meantime Lady Probyn had been enduring great anxiety, but presently—long before she expected him—she heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs in the courtyard, and rising hastily she stood at the door of her room listening for his footsteps on the stairs. There had been a time—no so long ago—when the first thing which Sir Dick did when he returned to the house, was to seek his mother. How well she knew his light step! Now again she heard it, but it was no longer light. Slowly and heavily she heard her son ascending the staircase, and he passed her door without pausing. There was soul weariness and disappointment in every footfall; could she have seen his face she would have known there was despair.

Lady Probyn still stood at the door, with clasped hands and parted lips, after she heard him enter his own room and close the door behind him. Once she thought of going to him, but a sense of delicacy made her shrink from intruding on moments when she thought he would rather be alone. Some minutes elapsed, and then again she heard his footsteps. He was leaving his room. Once more he passed her door, and then descended the staircase. She ran to the window. He was going out she concluded, and so he was. She watched him go down the terrace, and then saw him enter the park. She could not see his face, but his attitude, his bent head, told her of the dark unhappiness of his soul.

She fell down on her knees by the window, and prayed aloud for him.

"O Thou most merciful, most High, take this cloud from my son's heart! Burst forth from his imploring lips. Other words she said; words straight from her heart, and fraught with trust they would not be unheard. It was the cry of the creature to the Creator; from the lowly to the Great. And as she prayed with all the strength and passion of her soul, a strange thing came to her.

"Go to him. Do not leave him alone."

The message seemed whispered in her ears; seemed written in the air around her. Lady Probyn sprang to her feet. Not an instant did she hesitate. She ran out, dressed as she was, into the corridor. She hurried down the stairs as though her feet were winged, and a few moments later was in the park, taking the path that her son had done when she had seen him leave the house.

There was a green dell in which many a time he had played as a boy, where she had watched him as a child, with her husband by her side, and with a strong instinctive feeling she felt she would find him here.

She ran under the branching trees, she glanced quickly round, and then a cry so loud, so wild, burst from her frenzied lips, that it seemed to rend the air. She saw her son standing bare-headed before her; she saw a revolver in his raised hand; and she knew he had come out here to die!

Her wild scream reached his ears just as he touched the trigger of his weapon. He fired, but his mother's voice shook his hand, and diverted the correctness of his aim. He had meant to blow out his brains, instead of which the bullet ploughed through his cheek, and tore off part of his ear, and he fell at her feet, bleeding and terribly wounded, just as Lady Probyn reached his side.

CHAPTER XX.—AN ACCIDENT.

Lady Probyn's terrible cry had been heard by other ears as well as her unhappy son's. Mr. Trelawney, the Vicar, was walking meditatively in the woods at Hurst, when that scream of horror smote the air. He ran hastily in the direction from whence he thought it proceeded, and this was the sight that soon met his horror-stricken gaze.

Lady Probyn was kneeling on the ground, holding her son's head up in her arms, and his blood was streaming over her hands and dress. The Vicar uttered an exclamation, and as Lady Probyn raised her agonized eyes to his face, in a moment he was kneeling by her side.

He was a man prompt and thoughtful. In an instant it flashed through his mind what had occurred. He saw the revolver lying

on the grass, where it had fallen from Dick Probyn's nerveless hand; he saw the mother's uncovered white hair, and the terrible misery written on her face.

But he asked no questions, and she gave no explanation. He drew out his handkerchief and folded it tightly.

"Hold this across the wound," he said, "and press it as hard as you can, so as to partially, at least, stop the bleeding. Put his head a little lower—so. Now, I will run to the house for assistance, and send a man galloping for the doctor. It has been an accident."

Lady Probyn often remembered afterwards those last thoughtful words. If her son were spared to her, none need know of his rash deed.

"It has been an accident," she repeated, faintly; and then as the vicar rose and hastily left her, she lifted up her eyes in silent prayer.

"Only let me have been in time. O God, only let me have been in time," her soul cried forth, though no words came from her parted lips.

But this idea sustained her. She felt buoyed up with the thought that she had been sent to save her son; that her prayer had been heard and answered. Once or twice Dick moaned faintly, but he spoke no word, nor did Lady Probyn address him. She knelt, holding him up, her very attitude showing the tenderest love. And in the briefest time that it was possible, the Vicar returned to her, closely followed by servants, carrying restoratives, and all in a state of great excitement.

"We must not move him until the doctor arrives," said the Vicar, kneeling down by Dick's other side, and laying his hand on his wrist. They were anxious moments these. The Vicar was afraid to move the handkerchief which Lady Probyn still kept pressed tightly to her son's face, as the bullet had torn one of his lips before it entered his cheek. It was, indeed, a ghastly wound, and it was with more than thankful hearts that the doctor's hurrying footsteps at last were heard.

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The Vicar rose to receive him, and took his hand.

"Sir Richard has met with an accident," he said quietly.

The doctor nodded, and at once knelt down by Sir Dick.

"I think you had better go away for a few minutes, Lady Probyn," he suggested, "while I examine the wound."

"Yes, Lady Probyn," said the Vicar, and he assisted her to her feet. A pillow that one of the servants had brought was then placed beneath Sir Dick's head, and the doctor commenced his task. Alas! he knew as he looked that the comely young face was disfigured for evermore. He knew, too, that the wound, if not fatal, was of a dangerous nature, and after a brief examination, and having done all he could to staunch the bleeding, he had a word to whisper in the Vicar's ear.

"It is a very serious case," he said; "I should prefer that further advice from town was at once called in."

Lady Probyn, who was standing a little apart, as the doctor had beckoned the Vicar aside, now lifted her mute imploring eyes to his.

The doctor—a kind-hearted man—saw and understood the unspoken question. He, therefore, went up to Lady Probyn, and spoke to her as hopefully as he could.

"It is a serious wound," he said, "but we must hope for the best. He has youth on his side, and no doubt we will be able to pull him through. But as I have been telling the Vicar, I should like one of the leading surgeons from town called in. What do you say to Sir Richard Power?"

"Yes, telegraph," replied Lady Probyn, almost below her breath. "And—you give me hope?"

"Certainly," answered the doctor, with an assurance he was far from really feeling. But his words were balm to the mother's heart. She returned to her son's side; she knelt down and took his hand; she helped in all they did for him. It was a terrible day, but she bore it without flinching, and when the great surgeon from town arrived at night-fall, and confirmed the country doctor's opinion that they might pull him through, Lady Probyn's thankfulness was too great for words.

In the meantime a report had reached Redvers Court that there had been an accident at Hurst. Belle heard it from her maid when she went up to dress for dinner, and as she listened a chill thrill of fear crept into her heart.

"Shot himself?" she repeated, after a moment's silence. "When did it happen?"

"It must have happened soon after he was here, my lady," answered the maid; "for John Briggs, one of the gardeners, met a groom from Hurst tearing along the road at full gallop not an hour after Sir Richard rode out of the Court-yard here. And the groom shouted to John Briggs that there had been an accident at Hurst, and that Sir Richard had shot himself in the woods."

Belle grew pale, almost faint; she was remembering Sir Dick's last words to her; the despairing look in his face as he had turned and left her.

"Have you heard anything more?" she asked with faltering tongue.

"Dr. Davidson has been with him ever since," continued the maid, gratified to be the first to tell the news to her lady, for Sir Dick's attentions had not been noticed in the household, "and they say they have sent for some great London doctor; it was Lady Probyn who found him in the woods after he was shot."

Belle asked no more questions. She went down to dinner, but she could not eat, and before the evening was over she sent one of the servants to inquire after Sir Dick, and waited in great anxiety to hear the answer.

Lady Probyn was sitting by her son's bedside when the message was whispered to her, and her delicate face flushed when she heard Lady Stanmore's name. When he had first been carried to his room, her eyes had fallen on something glittering on the floor. She had stooped down and picked the jeweller's case which Sir Dick had carried to Redvers Court, so lately, with his heart full of hope and love. On his return, in his despair and bitter disappointment, he had flung it down, and the case had opened. Lady Probyn looked at the beautiful, costly stones, and her heart seemed to know their history. Her son had bought this magnificent gem for the woman he loved, and the woman he loved rejected it, and broken her boy's heart. She felt naturally but unjustly indignant. Belle was really not to blame for Sir Dick's infatuation, but his mother believed she was. She therefore felt angry when she

received Lady Stanmore's message of inquiry. She rose, left the bedside and went to the door of the room, outside of which the maid was waiting.

"Tell Lady Stanmore Sir Richard is very ill," she said. She rent no compliment or thanks, and with this cold comfort Belle was forced to be content. And the next morning it was the same thing; again Belle sent over to Hurst to inquire, and again the same answer was returned. It was not reassuring, and Belle spent an uneasy, anxious day. She had really liked Sir Dick; liked his bright, boyish nature, and the fear that his unfortunate attachment to herself had caused this catastrophe made her very unhappy.

She expected Stanmore and her Aunt Lucy, the Dowager Lady Stanmore, to arrive before dinner time, and the very first thing Stanmore said to her was:—

"What is this about Dick Probyn shooting himself, Belle?"

"It happened yesterday," answered Belle, in a somewhat uneasy voice, which Stanmore noted; "it was an accident; he shot himself in the woods. I sent last night to inquire, and again this morning."

"And what was the answer?" asked Stanmore, sharply.

"That he was very ill."

"It's a terrible business. Whatever will his mother do? He was here, Green told me, just before it happened?"

Green was the coachman who had been sent to the station to meet Stanmore and Lady Stanmore, and he had told his master of the tragedy that had occurred at Hurst, and also of Sir Dick's visit to Redvers.

"Yes, he was here," said Belle, trying to speak indifferently; "at least he called here when I was out—but I met him afterwards."

"And did he seem all right then?"

"Yes, I think so."

Belle felt by Stanmore's manner that he was suspicious of the circumstances of Sir Dick's shooting himself, and Stanmore actually was.

"It is an extraordinary thing," he continued; "what was he doing out with a revolver in the woods? At least, Green said the accident happened with a revolver."

Belle made no reply, and was glad that at this moment Lady Stanmore returned to the room. She had been giving some directions to her maid, and she now also began speaking of what had happened at Hurst.

"They say the poor fellow is badly wounded," she said, looking at Belle. "All the servants are talking about it; part of his face is torn away; it is a horrible thing. Poor Lady Probyn!"

"I pity the poor lady," answered Stanmore, and he also looked at Belle. "I will ride over for the first thing in the morning myself, and will try to see Lady Probyn."

And Stanmore did this. He rode over immediately after breakfast the next day to Hurst, and sent up his card, with a pencilled request written on it, that he particularly wished to be permitted to see Lady Probyn.

She granted his request. Pale, shattered, and trembling she appeared before him, after a night of watching, and when Stanmore took her hand with real sympathy in his tone and manner, she at first was quite unable to speak.

"How did it happen, my dear lady?" said Stanmore. "What was he doing out with a revolver in the woods?"

Lady Probyn's quivering lips could frame no reply. She lifted her blue eyes—so like poor Dick's—to Stanmore's face, and there was something in their expression that confirmed Stanmore's previous suspicions.

"But he has youth and a good constitution in his favor," continued Stanmore, kindly. "Oh you'll see he'll pull through all right."

"The doctors give us—hope," faltered Lady Probyn. "If only—his life is spared—"

"And what does he say himself?"

"He is not allowed to speak; his mouth is too much injured—it is terrible."

"It is indeed! Is there anything I can do for you, Lady Probyn? Any help that I can give you?"

The unhappy mother shook her head.

"The Vicar does all I require," she said; "he has been very good—but I can think of nothing—but my boy."

Stanmore wrung her hand and left her, full of pity for her great anxiety and pain. And when he returned to Redvers he at once sought out Belle.

"Come here, Belle," he said, "I want to speak to you, and he beckoned her into the library and shut the door behind her."

"I have a question to ask you," he said, and he was speaking very gravely. "Was there any scene between you and Dick Probyn, on the morning when he was here, before he shot himself?"

Belle hesitated; her eyes fell, and her cheeks flushed.

"What do you mean?" she asked after a pause.

"I mean in plain language did he make love to you?" continued Stanmore. "It seems to me the whole thing looks very like as if the poor fellow had made a fool of himself for the sake of a heartless woman."

"That is unjust of you," said Belle, looking up with some indignation.

"No, it is not; and you know very well what I mean. Dick Probyn is young and impulsive, and you allowed the poor young fellow to dangle after you until he lost his head. I warned you about it, and if you had seen his mother's face this morning you would have thought twice before you trifled with his feelings."

"I never trifled with his feelings; I told him I did not care for him."

"You care for no one, that is the truth, Belle; there never was a woman with a colder heart."

"Well you can think so if it pleases you," answered Belle, and she turned and left the room, feeling that she certainly had not deserved the hard words that Stanmore had spoken, at least as regarded poor Dick Probyn.

CHAPTER XXI.—AN UNFORGOTTEN FACE.

As days went on, the breach between Stanmore and Belle did not lessen. At last Lady Stanmore noticed this, and spoke seriously to Belle on the subject.

"Belle, have you and Jack had any quarrel?" she said, one day, as the two were sitting together in the morning room, and Stanmore had ridden over to Hurst—which he did constantly—to enquire after Sir Dick.


"He said some very unkind things to me about poor Sir Dick," answered Belle. "About your flirting with him? Well my

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dear, you did, you know."

"I certainly did not. He admired me. I believe—in fact, he asked me to marry him before I married Stanmore, but I never made any pretence to him that I cared for him, and I certainly did not."

"I don't think Jack thinks you either did or do. But, Belle, my dear, I am going to speak very gravely to you. He—Jack—as good as said to me last night that you care for no one. Now, is this wise?"

Belle made no answer.

"Jack, or Stanmore rather, has made you his wife," continued Lady Stanmore. "He has given you position, wealth, everything indeed that a woman can have, and he naturally expects some little return for this. If you give him no love, Belle, other women will."

"He knew I could give him no love," said Belle, in a low tone.

"You may have told him so, but of course, he did not believe it. And in Stanmore's position has not to go far to find it. There is a woman, Belle—a woman against whom I bear a grudge—who has certainly given Stanmore love. Take care you do not send him back to her."

"Who is the woman?" asked Belle, a little curiously.

"She is Mrs. Seymour, and undoubtedly handsome, though I do not see her. Jack has known her for years, and at one time she had great influence over him. She was a married woman then, but she is a widow now, and was bitterly disappointed when Jack married you. She came here and made a scene on your wedding day. I did not tell you this before, as I thought it unnecessary. I tell you now as a warning."

"I do not understand you."

"This woman will meet Jack again; she moves in the same set, and if you give him no love she will. He is a man remember, accustomed to be flattered and made much of, and if you give him nothing he will naturally turn to her. I have no object in saying this but your own good. You owe him at least gratitude, for he has done much for you."

"I will never do him any wrong."

"But you are doing him a wrong by your indifference."

"We cannot help our feelings," replied Belle, almost sullenly. "I told you before I married Stanmore that I could never love him, and I never can. I like him, though he was unjust about poor Dick Probyn, but that is all I can ever feel to him. My heart is quite cold to everyone. I think, Aunt Lucy," she added, "and then without another word she rose and left the room, and Lady Stanmore looked after her uneasily."

"She is very unwise," she thought, "but what can one do."

Belle went straight from the morning-room bareheaded as she was, out on the terrace, and then down to the gardens below. She was thinking of her life; the life that now seemed so wearisome to her, and also of her Aunt Lucy's words. The excitement and freshness of her new position was gone, and she had no home ties or joys to interest or amuse her.

"How different it might have been," she thought, and then she sighed restlessly.

Just at this moment she saw Stanmore riding down the avenue on his return from Hurst, and once more she sighed.

"If I had only been watching for him," she half-whispered, her mind pursuing the same train of ideas; watching for the husband she loved, the man who held heart in his keeping. Yet something prompted her—perhaps the memory of what Lady Stanmore had said—to walk forward a short distance to meet him. Stanmore looked and felt surprised when he saw her approaching.

"I pulled his horse up when he met her, and for a moment looked at her with involuntary admiration, as she stood with her bright head uncovered in the fresh autumnal air."

"You Belle?" he said.

"Yes, I saw you coming, and I came to ask you how poor Dick Probyn is this morning?"

Stanmore looked at her curiously.

"So you do feel a little sorry for poor fellow then?" he said.