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Her Promise True.

BY DORA RUSSELL.

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CHAPTER I. I. H.—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 agrees to meet him that evening for a final farewell. Upon her return to the hotel, where she and her mother are stopping she finds that Lord Stanmore, whose brother was the husband of Mrs. Wayland's sister, has arrived and has invited her mother and her to dine with him that evening. Mrs. Wayland goes to bed, but Belle, who is not at all surprised, goes to her room and writes a letter to Lord Stanmore, who she has just discovered that Belle has gone out to meet Gilbert and is 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 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 Richard Probyn calls upon the party, and invites them to visit him at Hurst Hall. He is greatly smitten with Belle. Lady Stanmore writes 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 to Hugh Gilbert. 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. 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, and she, in turn, tells him that she is engaged to Hugh Gilbert. Sir Dick Probyn proposes to Belle and she is refused. Lady Stanmore gets a letter from Mrs. Balfour, who writes that she has just learned on the same ship with Hugh Gilbert. It contains the starting news of Hugh Gilbert's marriage to Miss Vane. Belle is shocked. She is greatly shocked. She is taking a morning walk when she breaks through the ice.

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 in his anxiety to show Hugh Gilbert that she too has forgotten her engagement to him. 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 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 Probyn call upon them and invite them to dine at Hurst.

CHAPTER XII.—PLAYING WITH FIRE. Sir Dick grows more in love with Lord Stanmore's wife, which causes him a mother much uneasiness. Lord Stanmore also notices the young man's infatuation and warns Belle against encouraging him. They dine at Hurst and Belle is presented to Mr. Trelawney 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 sisterly affection.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued. "So you are going to marry Stanmore?" she said, holding out her hand. "Well, Belle, it's the very best thing you can do, and I am very glad."

"I thought you would be pleased," answered Belle, smiling, but with ever so faint a touch of bitterness in her tone. "I am very pleased—and your Aunt Lucy says she supposes it will be soon."

"They can settle it," replied Belle, with apparent carelessness; and then she went to the window of her mother's room and stood looking out on the misty park. What matter did it make, she was thinking, whether it was soon or late—it had to be?

She sighed restlessly, and her mother heard the sigh. "You are a most lucky girl, Belle," she said, with her usual want of taste. "I suppose so," answered Belle, turning round and looking at her mother's face. "But I doubt very much whether Stanmore can be called a lucky man."

"You must do your best to show your gratitude to him."

"But I have none. What do you suppose he is marrying me for? Merely because I am good-looking?"

"There are hundreds of good-looking girls in the world."

"Then I must be his style of good looks," said Belle, with a little laugh. "Everyone to their taste, you know."

Mrs. Wayland was about to make an angry retort, but she remembered in time that Belle would soon be Lady Stanmore and have a great deal in her power to bestow.

"Stanmore is rich," she said after a little pause.

"That's a blessing. Poverty is an odious thing; it drags people down; it degrades them."

"Well, you'll have no more poverty at all events. You must persuade Stanmore to go to Monte Carlo, Belle, before the winter is over, and I should not mind joining you there. In the spring of course, you'll be presented."

"I hope I'll do honour to my new husband," replied Belle lightly. "Well, good-bye for the present, mother; I am going out to drive with Stanmore."

Belle nodded her head as she said this, and left the room, and a quarter of an hour later she was sitting by Stanmore's side in a high open phaeton which he was driving.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE ICE WOMAN.

When the season wanted Stanmore and Belle went down to Redvers Court. "I am a little weary of it all," she told her husband the night before they left town.

"And yet you've had what women like best, plenty of admiration," answered Stanmore.

"They were standing together on a sultry evening at the end of June, in the balcony of their house in Park Lane, watching somewhat listlessly the carriages passing below."

"There is such a sameness about everything," continued Belle, "that it soon ceases to interest one."

"My dear, you are hot and tired, and therefore misanthropical," said Stanmore, laying his hand on her shoulder. "I also feel somewhat in the same vein, but I expect my dinner will put me all right; I wish Lucy would come."

"So you have arrived?" she said. "How delighted your mother will be!" Sir Dick was too much agitated to speak articulately for a few moments; and Belle consideredately went on talking.

"She called on Friday," she continued; "every time I see Lady Probyn I think her more beautiful. You are a happy young man to have the love of such a mother!"

"She—she is very good," stammered Sir Dick. "You must never do anything to vex her," went on Belle, smiling. "You must let her be the guardian angel of your life, who will keep you from all wicked things."

"Do—do you believe in guardian angels?" blurted out Sir Dick. "No," and Belle shook her head; "I once did, but not now."

"I think you could become."

"Me! I am afraid it would be an angel of darkness then. I am of the world, worldly."

"Oh! Lady Stanmore!"

"Quite true, I assure you. If you were my son I should warn you against myself. I should say, 'You will learn nothing good from the present Lady Stanmore.' And Belle laughed.

"If I were your son," repeated Sir Dick, with a laugh also. "Why I am years and years older than you."

"But years do not always make age. Some people's youth has quite a sudden death. I feel far older than you."

"Why do you chaff me, Lady Stanmore?" "I am not chaffing you. But it strikes me it is rather warm standing here in the sun? Suppose we go and sit on that seat under the big tree over there? I have got plenty of flowers, I think."

"Let me carry them for you."

She put her basket, filled with the lovely blossoms she had culled, into his hand, and they walked together across the sunny lawn to a more sheltered part of the grounds, and sat down on a rustic seat that Belle had pointed out, placed beneath the spreading branches of a huge elm, whose green leaves were fluttering in the summer breeze.

"This is a pleasant change," said Belle, leaning against the gnarled trunk of the tree. "How quiet it is, isn't it? So different to town."

"But so—so much better."

"I don't know, I am sure; I signed to leave town; I was weary of the late hours, the constant whirl from one place to the other; the sameness of everything; but now I think I am beginning to find the country dull! Stanmore and I dined alone last night, and I assure you it was by no means lively."

These words were far from unpleasing to Sir Dick's ears.

"That reminds me," he said, his stammer disappearing as if by magic, which it sometimes did, that my mother sent me over expressly to ask what day you will give us the pleasure of dining with us?"

"It is very good of Lady Probyn, and I shall be delighted to go to Hurst again," replied Belle.

"What day will come then?"

"Wait till we go in, and see Stanmore," said Belle; "he may have some engagement I do not know of."

As she spoke she took off the broad-brimmed straw hat she was wearing, and shook back the brown curls on her brow. Never had she looked so lovely! The sun, glancing through the green boughs above her, fell on her sweet face; the heat had flushed her smooth cheeks. Poor Sir Dick! He sat entranced, gazing at the charming profile turned a little away from him, for a sudden fancy had seized Belle, and she began tastefully some of the beautiful deep-tinted roses from her basket into her hat, with delicate white fingers.

"Don't they look smart?" she asked smiling. "I ought to be going to a garden party instead of sitting alone under a tree with you!"

"And—which would you like best?" asked Sir Dick almost breathlessly.

Belle looked archly round at the young man's earnest face.

"How can I answer such a question?" she said. "It would be the rudest thing for a hostess to say I should prefer the garden party, and I fear it would flatter you too much to tell you I like best being here with you."

"If I thought—" began Sir Dick; but luckily at this moment a step was heard approaching on the gravel, and the scent of a cigar came wafting in the air.

"Here is Stanmore I suppose," said Belle.

"He is always smoking," said Stanmore, who did not look particularly pleased when he saw the two sitting under the big tree. Belle, bareheaded, with her flower-decked hat on her lap. But he received Sir Dick kindly enough.

"Well, Dick," he said, holding out his hand, and how are you this fine day?"

"Sir Dick rose nervously to respond to his salutation, and Stanmore languidly sat down by his wife's side.

"Sir Richard has come over to ask us to dine at Hurst, Stanmore," said Belle. "We have to fix our own day, but I told him I would wait until I saw you."

"Quite a pattern wife," answered Stanmore, a little sarcastically though he was smiling as he spoke. "I thought wives nowadays made their own engagements without ever consulting the unfortunate man. Sit down, Dick. Well, it's very good of you and Lady Probyn to ask us."

"Only—too delighted to see you," stammered Sir Dick.

"I wish I had fixed the day myself instead of being sneered at as a pattern wife," said Belle, brightly, going on arranging the flowers in her hat. "Well, to punish you, Stanmore, I will, Sir Richard, we shall be very happy to dine with you and Lady Probyn the day after tomorrow—that will be Friday, won't it?"

Stanmore slightly shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, that will be Friday," he said.

"I shall look forward to Friday, then. Mother, I know will be delighted to see you both," eagerly answered Sir Dick.

"And now it's luncheon time, isn't it?" said Belle rising, and replacing her hat: "and I hope you will give us the pleasure of your company to lunch, Sir Richard?"

Sir Dick was only too happy to accept her invitation. When he was with her a strange exhilaration seemed to steal over him, and he lived a new life that her presence made beautiful. Stanmore noticed his animation at lunch, his fervid, admiring looks. He did not fear for Belle, but for the young man, to whom he knew she was indifferent.

But with the waywardness that was now part of her nature, the meal was scarcely over when Belle proposed that Sir Dick should row her on the lake.

"I have never been on it," she said. "Yes, Belle, once," answered Stanmore, rather in a marked manner.

His words recalled to her mind the miserable morning when she had so nearly lost her life, and her brow instantly clouded.

"I have changed my mind, I won't row this afternoon," she said looking at Sir Dick. "Oa, do, Lady Stanmore," he entreated, "it will be so beautiful with the sunlight on the water. Let me run down and see about getting the boat ready for you."

He was so much in earnest that Belle at last gave her consent, and Sir Dick hurried away to prepare the boat for her, and Belle and Stanmore were alone.

"Is this a very wise thing to do, Belle?" asked Stanmore gravely.

"To do what? To row on the lake with Sir Dick? What harm is there in it?" she answered.

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getting really to care for me," she thought. "But do men ever care as we do? They forget easily and quickly enough at all events—after they have spoilt our lives!"

As she approached the house Stanmore saw her, but he did not go to meet her. Her words before she had gone out to row with Sir Dick were still ranking in his mind, and there was a sense of vague disappointment in his heart. He knew Belle did not love him, and this knowledge was not pleasant.

"But it is not that poor lad," he thought. "I wonder if Lucy knows more than I do?"

And when Stanmore next saw Belle he made no further allusion to Sir Dick. It was indeed a subject tactfully avoided by them both, and even when they were driving to dine at Hurst on the day Belle had fixed neither spoke of him.

A small party had assembled to meet them in the beautiful old-fashioned drawing-room at Hurst, when they arrived there. Lady Probyn, stately and gracious as usual, received them with gentle courtesy, but as her eyes quitted Belle's charming face, she looked at her son. Alas! there was no mistaking the eager pleasure and happiness so plainly written in Sir Dick's expression. The Stanmores had arrived rather late, and their young host had shown unmistakable signs of restlessness and uneasiness until they came. Now he went quickly forward to welcome them, and his mother suppressed a sigh as he watched him.

All those present knew Stanmore, but Belle was a comparative stranger among her new country neighbours. Sir Dick soon claimed his undoubted right to take the bride in to dinner, and a pair of pretty grey eyes saw him offer his arm to Belle, with a certain vague feeling of jealousy she could not account for.

These pretty grey eyes belonged to Amy Trelawney, the only daughter of the Vicar of Hurst. She had known Dick Probyn all her life, and he and her two soldier brothers had been chums and companions from their boyhood to their young manhood. The Vicar—the Rev. Richard Trelawney—had been Dick Probyn's tutor for many years, as his mother would never part with him to go to a public school. And gradually—unconsciously to herself—there had grown up in Amy Trelawney's heart a warmer attachment to Dick Probyn than circumstances warranted. For on Sir Dick's part it was totally unreturned. He liked the little girl he had played with—nay often romped with—in his childhood, but he had never dreamed of love in connection with her name. And to do Amy justice she made no sign of her own feelings. They had been "Dick" and "Amy" to each other always, and "Dick" and "Amy" they remained. But a subtle difference had stolen into the girl's heart, and the touch of Sir Dick's hand now thrilled her whole being.

And again, as the dinner went on, she looked at Sir Dick's face. Never before had she seen on it the expression there was now. It was lit up as it were with the deep strong feelings of his heart. His blue eyes were shining as they had never shone on poor Amy, and there was that nameless gladness, that sweetness of content, which the presence of those we love only gives.

It was a revelation to Amy Trelawney; a shock. Brought up in a country village; reared in the household of a somewhat strict father and mother, the idea that Sir Dick had any strong regard for another man's wife filled Amy with absolute consternation. True, echoes from a world that was all new to her, since her brothers had joined the Army had occasionally reached her ears. But that Dick Probyn, the good son, the bright-faced companion of her girlhood, should so far forget himself seemed actually impossible.

Yet there was Sir Dick with no eyes, no ears for anyone else at the table, but the charming white-clad figure by his side. Other un gay glances were also directed at the young host. Lady Probyn could scarcely conceal her uneasiness as she looked at her son's face. He was drifting into a terrible danger she felt; into the pitfalls of a passion to which there could be no honourable end.

And when the men rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room after dinner it was the same thing. It chanced to be a moonlight night, and the white beams were streaming down on the glass roof of the conservatory, which opened from one end of the room. Belle and a Lady Lee, another guest, went among the fragrant flowers, for which Lady Probyn was famous, and Sir Dick's eyes no sooner perceived this than he joined them there.

"What a glorious night it is, Lady Stanmore," he said, addressing Belle; "wouldn't it be jolly to have a walk round the garden—like we once had?" he added in a lower tone.

But Belle smilingly shook her head. "No, we must leave the garden for the rays and the fairies to disport themselves in tonight," she answered. "I suppose they always have a ball in the moonlight?"

Sir Dick laughed.

"Let us go and see," he urged.

But Belle refused; perhaps she had seen the expression of Lady Probyn's face at dinner, and had not quite forgotten Stanmore's warning words.

"Shall we go back into the room?" she said to Lady Lee.

Lady Lee assented; and as Belle moved up between the flowers, her white dress accidentally touched a rose tree. In a moment Sir Dick, who was following her, stopped down and plucked the leaves her gown had moved, and fastened them in his coat. Lady Lee saw the action, but Belle did not, yet when they entered the lighted drawing-room she noticed the green spray he had not worn at dinner.

"Did one of the fairies give you that?" she asked, looking at the rose leaves in his coat.

"No, but a fairy touched it as she passed," he answered; "I shall always keep it."

"Fairy gifts are not lucky, you know," said Belle.

"Are they not? I think this fairy's gifts would be."

"You are very sentimental, Sir Richard." At this moment, however, Lady Probyn put an end to the conversation. She brought up and presented to Belle the Rev. Richard Trelawney, the Vicar of Hurst, and his daughter, Amy. The Rev. Richard was a man of strong personality. He held broad views, yet lived a life of almost rigid asceticism.

"I fear myself," he once said to a soul friend. And these words were the key-note to his character. But at all events he had "fought the good fight," and lived a blameless and doubtless life. His daughter almost worshipped him, and his soldier sons came to him in their troubles, and trusted him, as the children of a good man should do.

"We can't expect old heads on young shoulders," he would tell his friend Lady Probyn; "our boys have all their follies; wisdom will come to them with years."

He bowed gravely when he was introduced to Belle, and looked with his compassionate grey eyes on her fair face. He too had noticed at dinner the eager looks of admiration with which his ex-pupil had regarded her; and had sighed, thinking of the poor lad's probable disappointment and pain. He remembered when a similar temptation had once assailed his own soul, and his terrible struggles with an infatuation he could never resist. The woman he had loved never knew it, but it made the Vicar feel very pitiful for her son.

"And how do you like our neighbourhood?" he asked in a sweet-toned serious voice.

"I think Hurst is a charming place," answered Belle, "and Redvers Court is a fine old house, but I have seen very little of the country round."

"You are not used to country life, I suppose?" said the Vicar.

Belle smilingly shook her head.

"No, I have never lived for long in it; I fancy it would grow very monotonous to me."

"You like excitement?"

"Yes, I am afraid I do."

"Yet you will weary of it."

"I weary of everything," said Belle, still smiling. "I am like a child, always wanting a new toy."

"Please do not say that," Lady Stanmore, pleaded Sir Dick, who was still standing near her.

"You know it is true," she answered. Then she turned to Miss Trelawney, and addressed her graciously.

"And you like country life, I suppose?"

"I have always been accustomed to it," answered Amy Trelawney, with a touch of anger in her tone she could not suppress.

"The daughter of a country parson has no choice," said the Vicar, kindly; "and my girl here is as good as a couple of curates to me. She does half the parish work."

"Oh, no, father!" answered Amy, and then her grey eyes stole to Sir Dick's face to see if her father's praise was pleasant to his ears. But there was no answering look. Sir Dick was not thinking of her, and had scarcely heard the Vicar's words.

But Lady Probyn had.

"That is quite true, Amy," she said. "I do not know what we would do without you at Hurst."

"And do you visit the poor?" asked Belle, looking with some interest at the girl's face. "If you do, may I give you some money to give them?"

"Perhaps you would come with me some day?" answered Amy Trelawney half shyly.

"No," said Belle, "but anything you want I shall gladly give you. I always feel sorry for poor people," she added, "though rich people are often poor too."

"You mean in happiness?" asked the Vicar, with the keen intuition which was part of his nature.

"Yes," replied Belle, quickly, and then she turned away, and moved to a different part of the room, and Mr. Trelawney's thoughtful eyes followed her as she did so.

"She has some secret grief," he thought, "which she is trying to forget; but I fear for Dick—he is playing with fire."

A week or so after this dinner party at Hurst, the Vicar's presentiment became true: Dick Probyn had been playing with fire, and the flame had scorched his soul.

CHAPTER XIX. A MOTHER'S PRAYER.

Amy Trelawney often went to Hurst Hall, and would sit for hours with Lady Probyn. She had done this when she was a little girl, when her own mother was alive; and she did it now in her young womanhood. She never even told herself her secret attraction to the place; and it Lady Probyn was not blind to it, she also was quite reticent on the subject.

But on the morning after Belle had dined at Hurst, Lady Probyn noticed a new restlessness in the girl's manner. Amy generally brought her work, for her dearest fingers were nearly always fully employed. But to-day she moved about the morning-room, as if it were impossible for her to be still. At present she spoke of Belle.

"Lady Stanmore is very pretty," she said.

"Yes," replied Lady Probyn, with a ring of pain in her voice; "it is certainly a charming face, though I do not know whether I care very much for her manner; it is too—too careless."

"Dick seems to know her very well, and to admire her very much," continued Amy Trelawney, nervously.

"He knew her before her marriage, you know," answered Lady Probyn, the ring of pain deepening as she spoke; "then he met her at Monte Carlo when she was on her wedding-tour, and they were very kind to him, and in town during the season afterwards."

Amy said nothing more, but when she was gone Lady Probyn sat still, thinking sadly and seriously of her words. Should she speak to her boy, she was asking herself; warn him of the danger into which he was plunging so recklessly? But would this be wise? Lady Probyn knew enough of her warm impetuous nature to fear it might do but harm.

"She does not care for him," she presently decided; "that is his safeguard."

But this was a safeguard which he either did not or would not see.